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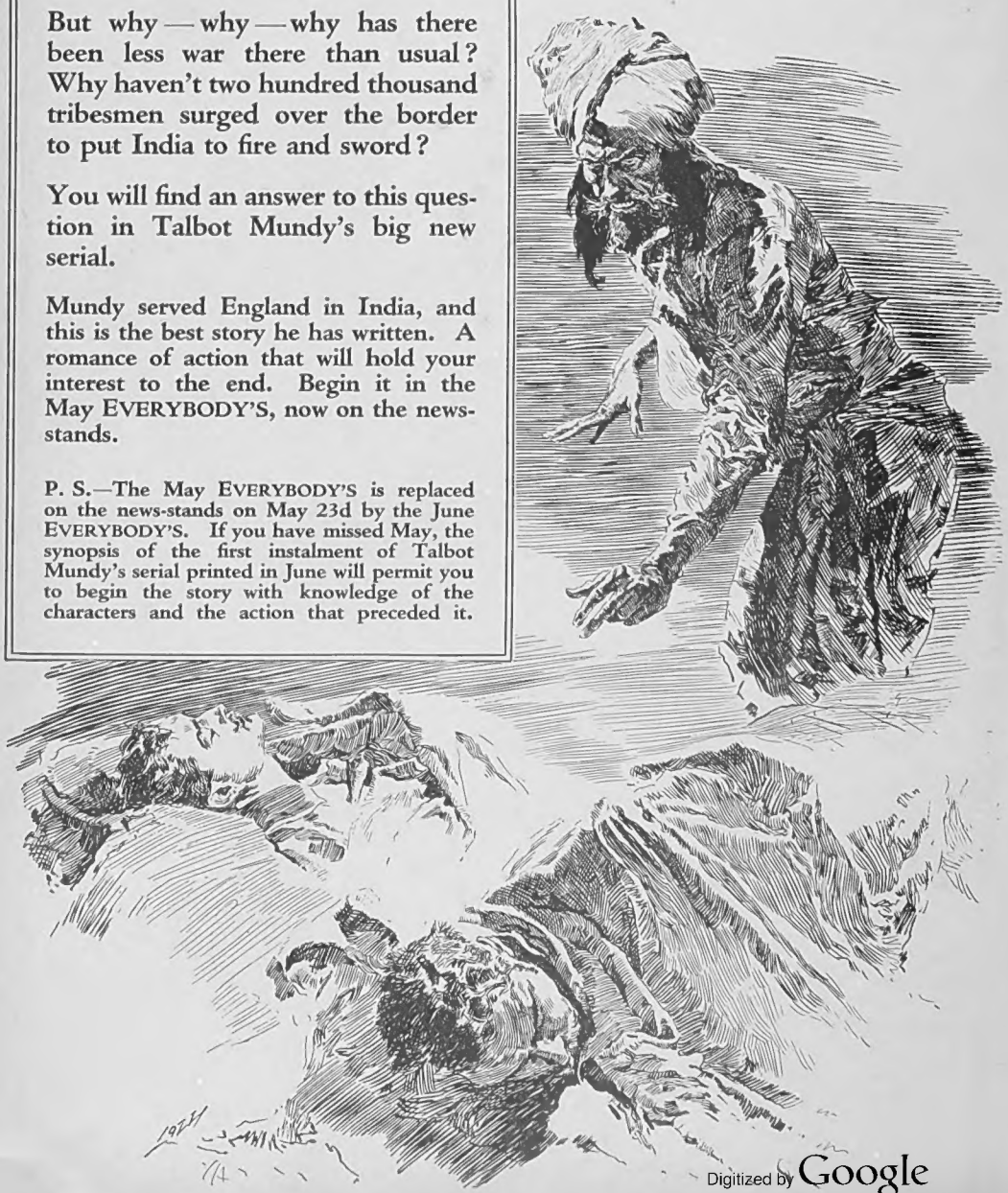
By TALBOT MUNDY

Beginning in the May EVERYBODY'S



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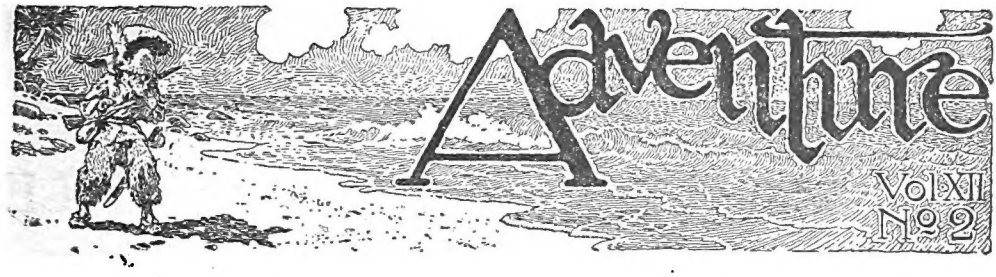

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Turn to "The Trail Ahead"—last page.

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June 1916 Vol. 12 No. 2

DAN WHEELER—MAN HANDLER

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Dr John I. Cochrane

Author of "The Crimson Chamber," "A Drop of Doom," etc.

STRANGELY different, right at the start, Dan Wheeler was born of rich but honest parents, and that, too, in the Borough of Manhattan. His mother, fair-haired, Spanish and beautiful, he never saw; but his father was a prosperous Irish contractor. I quote the dread cracksman-gambler at the height of his dangerous career:

"Square any way you took him, the old gentleman was—four-square with hard corners, so sharp they gouged—principles, he called them. And, believe me, he lived by those principles. He had a jaw on him!"

Yet, for all his stern uprightness and stiff principles, the honest old Tammany contractor gave his boy a loose rein. It may have been because this tow-headed, green-eyed angel child reminded him of the mother—or because he was all the old gentleman had left—possibly Wheeler, Sr., was given wisdom to know that cramping discipline would rouse a fearsome demon in this silent, girl-faced boy—anyhow, Danny's school course was short and troubled.

He got things out of books and into his head without any obvious process, and teacher would gladly have made a pet of him, with his delicate, appealing beauty; but Danny counted that day lost whose record did not contain a fight, and a good one. He was born to fight hard and then fight some more, and he was not satisfied to get a decision. He had to lick the other fellow beyond all reason or mercy.

So he fought his way up to the school-bully and was three times whipped before he got young Collins down and hammered him until teacher came to the rescue. In the interview that followed teacher was pale, tearful and sick. She looked at the face of the boy before her, and something in the thin, firm lips and long green eyes made her shiver. She had to remind herself that the culprit was not yet twelve.

"Dan, *why* did you beat Tom so cruelly?"

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She did not have to wait for an answer. Dan was not sullen, and met her eyes squarely.

"It was coming to him." The firm lips closed in a line once more.

"But, Dan," teacher found herself pleading, "just think—you might have injured him seriously. And do you call it fair or brave to hit a boy when he's down? Why did you, Dan?"

She choked at the memory. It was brutal. Then she was chilled by the look in the amber-green eyes. They seemed to look through her and far beyond, with a cold, fierce stare. She remembered such a look in the eyes of the "big cats" in the zoo. Dan said, as much to the world at large as to her—

"I got to break him."

"Dan," low and eagerly, "won't you promise me not to fight with Tom any more? You have beaten him—promise me, Dan!"

The boy shook his head just once with steel firmness and decision.

"I got to break him," he repeated in the same even tone. "He's got three more lickings coming to him." After a moment's silence he added, "Probably they will be worse."

They were. In spite of a caning by the superintendent and a paternal strapping given with true Wheeler thoroughness, the three lickings were delivered as per contract. The result, moreover, was according to plan. When, after a painful session with the strap following the third and conclusive battle, the elder Wheeler asked breathlessly—

"Now, Danny, are you going to half murder that boy again?"

Danny answered without spite or any emotion except possibly satisfaction:

"Not now. I got through. He's broke!"

"Broke" meant that the one-time bully was thoroughly subdued and terrified—so thoroughly that he did not even dare breathe vengeance to himself, and ran from the very sight of the tow-head and green eyes of his small conqueror.

In years to come many a man was to feel the same soul-shriveling terror. That instinct of fierce mastery seems to have been born in young Wheeler, and showed thus early as a ruling passion. It was to drive him far and wide in his quest of adventure, and leave his path marked by many a ruin. It was like a restless demon within him, hungry and never sated.

I can see the compelling, handsome presence of the great gambler and man-breaker as he told me in answer to a question:

"It began 'way back yonder as far as I can remember—the hankering for strong meat. Things had to have a bite to get me—action a-plenty, action and a quick decision. Any sporting proposition at long odds I couldn't let get by. Any game with swift movement and a sharp kick to it was my game, and the longer the odds against, the more fun to win out. But there had to be a real stake to win, and I had to win it. Then it was on to something else.

"Wild? Yeh—wild as they run, I reckon. I tried everything once. If I didn't win I tried again, until I landed in the money. I had to win. I was made that way. If I was going to hell I'd never trail in with the also-rans—I'd land ahead of the favorite or blow up in the stretch.

"That's one reason I never was a sosh or a woman-chaser. I wasn't built for a hog, nor a boar, but I was wild to run away from the bunch, to get out of the ruck and finish alone. I could see that rum and rotten living would mean my finish. Ah, there's nothing to it!

"Same way with the college course the old gentleman had mapped out for me. The rah-rah boys looked to me like a lot of soft lollops—easy-marks for any crook that saw them first. They made me sick before I was out of short pants."

AFTER young Dan had been taken out of school by reason of his fights, he had a private tutor who had done nothing whatever to deserve such a fate and whose adventures would make an octavo Jeremiad on India paper. Dan was as savage at books as with his hands, and read everything in reach; but he couldn't use any algebra, balked at Latin and refused to parse anything whatever; there were too many other things to do.

He had a gift of tongues and early learned to speak several brands of English, book English among them, but he preferred to take them first-hand and waste no time on analysis. Moreover, there was the main business of life—fighting. Let him tell it:

"Things would have been dead slow about that time if I hadn't got me a rope-ladder.

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Then Wednesday and Saturday nights I'd go to bed early, shin out my window and cut through the alley on my way to Joe Brine's.

"Joe made some money pulling off finish-fights in the hall over his Bowery saloon. All it cost him was five or ten to the winner and to fix the 'bull' on the beat. It was a regular school for pugs and more than one light or welter champ got his start, when he was a newsy, right in Joe's little old place.

"Joe was more than half white, at that; he gave me a point or two on my first go. Sure! I had to get into it—and after that I was one of his safe bets. I worked up from the featherweight, and when I was sixteen I put away some good middles. I wasn't so bad for a kid, even before I met Jem Slater.

"That was when the curtain rang up on the Big Time for me, all right, the night I met 'Dandy Jem, the Man Who Couldn't Lose.' I'd heard of him, of course, but he'd never been down to Joe's. He was a solid business man in business hours, with a bank-balance and a three-A rating, Slater & Moss, brokers. But Moss did the business. Slater was too busy living to bother with bonds—and didn't he live! He did—yes! Well——

"I didn't see him that night, until we'd gone one round, and were mixing it in the second. I'd clinched to stop a rush, and over my man's shoulder I saw Slater right near the ropes.

"And Dempsey was with him—yeh, Jack Dempsey—they were friends. I knew them both and—well, I cut loose—blew up! I was always that way ever since I was a kid—had spells when I'd tear loose, and then things would happen right away. I had my man sleeping inside a minute, and he hadn't waked up when they both came into the little hole where I was dressing—Slater and Dempsey.

"They looked bigger than the President to me then, and when Slater shook and said I was 'a game young cyclone' it made me dizzy.

" 'I know your father, young man,' he said. 'But does he know you come here?'

"My throat was dry, but I shook my head.

" 'So I supposed,' he said mighty solemn. 'I'd put a stop to it, if I were in his place.'

" 'How?' I flared out and looked him in the eye for the first time.

"For a minute he never moved, then his face twitched. He stroked his long upper lip and said in his slow drawl:

" 'I *beg* pardon—my mistake!'

"Then he half-whispered to Dempsey:

" 'Look here, Jack—here's what I've told you about—the man-tamer's eye. Get a fair shot from these lamps and tell me how you feel. *Mister* Wheeler, let me present Mr. Dempsey!'

"Dempsey didn't say much; he wasn't that kind. But he did some sizing-up, and me—I was doing a standing long blush and hunting a place to put a few dozen hands. Slater kept talking:

" 'You belong in better company, son. How would you like to take a few lessons from Jack, here, and learn to use some other weapons? You've got the stuff, or I lose.'

"I wasn't sure what he meant. But take lessons from Dempsey—would I? Suppose a man could get a flashlight of what he doesn't know? Wouldn't it make his knees sag? I was young, and I thought I might pick up a point here and there—perhaps! Well——"

Here the fatal gambler moved his handsome head slowly sidewise, while the thin lips threatened to smile. I held my peace, and he went on:

"It was Jem Slater who gave me my college course, a course that doesn't come in books or go in words. Even my father had no objection to him, for Slater had the name of being a square man and a consistent winner in the 'Street.' But he was a ten-time winner outside—a winner at the 'Game' in every department. Life's too short to tell about him—he was one live man! My hat's off to Dandy Jem.

"Once I asked him why he spent all that time teaching me to handle the foils, six-gun and so on. All I got was: 'You were born to it, Dan—a born manhandler. And youth will be served.' One thing sure—he taught me what I know and a lot I've lost. He was more than an athlete and master-at-arms—he made Galahad look like a hobo to me. He was the man that happens only once, and as I said, words don't fit him. He told me what to read and what not to drink, when to go to bed and how to keep in training without going stale. Me, I had the sense to do it and ask no questions. Those were days, Doc!"

And at that time there was no more about the man who had meant the most in his life. It was some days later that he took up the story of his own accord:

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"I FORGOT to mention that I was supposed to be working in the office for Slater & Moss, but I didn't take any orders from Moss—we couldn't use any of each other—and I was out with Slater most of the time. He seemed to enjoy it as much as I did, and mostly the way folks got fooled on me.

"He used to say: 'Just don't let 'em get a slant into those tiger lamps of yours, Dan, and you'll pass for mama's angel-face—until they see you in action.'

"That was one night when some young rounder in a restaurant had picked me for his meat; he didn't have to advertise long for trouble. Slater proposed that we go argue it out where there was room for appropriate gestures, and we adjourned to Dempsey's place. The lad didn't want to use the gloves, figured that he'd scare a poor hick—that was Slater's guess. So he whispered: 'Don't face him square until you're stripped and ready—and use that new body uppercut of Jack's. It ought to work fine with the bare knucks.'

"The lad fooled us, at that. He was game, after I'd slashed him up and he'd bled some of the booze out of him.

"Sure! He took the count after two minutes of the second round. You can't put a man out so quick when he's bleeding—that's why thin gloves will get you groggy sooner than brass-knucks even, unless you land a full-swing haymaker by luck. Letting blood keeps your head clear. You've scrapped enough to know that. That uppercut? It was low, landed from a sort of crouch, and that was before the day of the crouch. You caught your man on the edge of the ribs just above the belt, on a slant. It was a dirty one, and left your sand all in the discard. After I'd hooked this lad there twice, it was a slaughter. I laid him away with a jaw-jolt.

"A friend of his that had been in his corner came to me while I was soaking hot water to my lip, to say there was no hard feeling.

" 'Say, you could clean up real money at catch-weights, with that face of yours,' he said. It was old stuff to me, but I said:

" 'How's that? Working the Hick Circuit?'

" 'Any old circuit,' he says. 'Make trouble with the local bad-man, then have your friend take the small end of the bets. That map of yours looks easy at first sight; any gink would fall for it if you'd shade your lamps—they give you away.' By then I was getting sore on that eye-talk. But he wasn't hunting bother—he meant all right—so I passed it up. Later I found there was something in that notion, stale as it sounds, and I used it many a time.

"Am I putting you to sleep, Doc, with all this cheap stuff?"

As he startled me by the sudden question, I remember I was looking into the strange amber-green depths, noting the cold tenseness of their glare from between the long-slit lids; and the upper lid, never winking, was held in a low level line. The effect was ominous and strangely benumbing, always. I never saw the like.

I had to shake myself alive to answer, and to urge the great gambler to go on. I confess to an uncivilized itch to hear about his starker doings, but one doesn't ask, "How about the first man you ever killed?" One does not ask a man like Sled Wheeler, at least. I cleared my throat to say:

"Never felt less like sleep in my life. This Slater—he isn't alive?"

"No." The steady, daunting eyes did not leave mine. "He—died. That's a part of a story that——"

Slowly the fine, dangerous face darkened like a craggy mountain swept by a Winter wind, as the shadow of a memory passed. The eyes no longer saw me, looked through and away from me, as he finished—"That no other man knows."

II

IT WAS in the days when New York was all agog over La Buerthe —pronounced Bu-art, like Stuart. Cécile Buerthe sang and danced—especially danced—for wicked prices at private and public entertainments. Yet, for all that, and although clubdom was hot on her trail, no man had succeeded in effecting even the appearance of a *liaison* or anything else French and disrespectable. So it stirred up much talk when she was seen on the Avenue, driving her blood-bays with "Dandy Jem" Slater beside her.

Bets were made that the "dark man would get him," for the woman was reported to be guarded by an ogre who had devoured one youthful admirer already. Also other bets were made that Slater would spend his Summer this year wherever La Buerthe took

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her vacation, or that they would vanish together when oysters disappeared from the bills of fare.

Young Piet Van Twiller, fourth, made and won one of the latter bets.

As to the former—the doom of Slater—that is another and later story.

Young Van Twiller entered his club's lounge-room one fine morning—it is the club with most plate-glass on the Avenue—plainly triumphant and gorged with raw information.

"You lose, Hank!" he called to his fat friend in the window. "I just saw Slater off at the Grand Central. He said good-by to La Buerthe at the gate. Set 'em up!"

"Not yet—it's going to be a stand-off. We got another bet on young Wheeler. You bet that he'd find out where Slater goes in Summer, and show him up. And there goes Wheeler now. My aunt! Did you get that? Fan me—I'm faint!"

What the young clubmen saw through the plate-glass was the same La Buerthe, same blood-bays drawing her trap; but in the seat beside her was Dan Wheeler, and as they looked at the strikingly handsome pair they were shocked speechless. Here we must go back for a fresh start.

Dan Wheeler had gone through a short but virulent attack of puppy-love two Summers before, and since that time had rather shied at women. Slater had been his guide, philosopher and whole family in the meantime; hence Dan was doubly lonesome when Slater left for his Summer vacations, and this year he had gone to the station intending to ask Slater at the last minute to take him along on this mysterious junket. So far he had never discovered anything about Slater's yearly recreations, when that fascinating personage simply went away with no baggage and came back with no explanations.

But when Slater presented him formally to this graceful woman whom he had admired from a distance, something happened to him inside. He got a picture of deep black eyes that were afire in their deeps, of a round creamy chin and neck, and other things. Then he saw clearly only this one beautiful woman, while all about her became blurred and dim.

She had barely noticed his existence, but in watching the poise and grace of her he had forgotten to speak to Slater—forgotten what he was going to say to him. But when the train was gone and she swept past him on the way to her carriage, she had shot him through with a narrowed glance. It came from under long black lashes over rounded creamy cheeks, and with it he heard a low rich murmur—

"You may come, if you like!"

All down the Avenue she handled the spirited bays, scornfully unconscious of his presence. He decided this was bluff and his thin lips curled, but she did not see him. He watched and waited. At last she slanted another provocative look with head backthrown—

"Well—is it that you are afraid?"

"Sure. I'm afraid," he answered promptly. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"And you stare—you stare as if you had never before seen a woman."

"I never did, like you!"

"Bravo! Ver' good, for a boy!" She turned and got the full force of his strange eyes as she talked. "But I put the words in your mouth—*'C'pas?* You—do you know," she said slowly, eyes widening, drawing nearer, "you have——"

"Yes, cat's eyes. I know. That's what they all say. But that's not what made you take me up. Why did you do it?"

Though the lure of her was still stronger every instant, he felt he had himself, and her, in hand now. He spoke with assurance.

"Not for your eyes?" She raised her fine brows. "Why not for your *beaux yeux, mon ami?*" Again she leaned near to whisper: "How do you know that I am not madly in love with you? Do you not love me—no?"

"No. And I don't want to, either. That's what gets me. I don't even like you. I know nothing about you, yet I got foolish the moment I set eyes on you. I guess I have no license to marry any woman, yet I used to think I wanted to marry some time—until I saw you today."

"Tiens!" She expressed a world of astonished raillery by her tone and face. "Fancy that, now! So sudden—and all that sort of thing, y'knaow! What wisdom! *Quelle bêtise! Dites-moi, mon ami.* What age have you?"

She leaned close again with exaggerated interest.

"Old enough to know that when any man gets soft at first sight of a pretty woman, that man had better pass 'em all up. So you see it's not so foolish as it sounds. Besides,

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I'm not such a kid as you think, and I will prove that so you'll know it."

"Why do you not love me? Is it that you find me—og-lee?" she murmured, one small, gloved hand pressing his knee, and all the sex-lure in low tones and slow, languorous smile.

She was so near that he felt her breath. Her smiling lips were warm and sweet. For the moment he didn't know whether they were in a carriage or a canoe, and didn't care.

Of course he did—he was a man.

It was this kiss that Van Twiller saw from the window, along with a few other appreciative young men, on the Avenue in broad daylight.

At the warm touch of velvet lips Wheeler was aroused by the surge of passion that swept over him. He raised his eyes as he sat up and glared at the few smiling pedestrians. As his cold, threatening gaze met theirs, one by one they lost their smiles with surprising suddenness. Then Dan turned the same steely look on the woman at his side.

"Why did you do that? I haven't coin enough to do you any good. And why did you take me along in the first place? I mean it and I intend to know!"

"*Tiens!* And suppose I do not intend to tell you, m'sieu?"

She flashed anger from her black, black eyes, but his green ones seemed to draw from hers the fire. At length she looked away, with a shrug.

"You are very young!"

It is the unpardonable insult to youth. Before he could speak coherently she added:

"No wonder M'sieu Slater did not want to take you along. That is a *man's* business."

"Thanks. I knew you'd answer my question," he said quietly. "Now you will tell me the rest."

"Where shall I set you down? It is only two blocks to my house."

"Here." They were at Madison Square as she reined to the curb. "But when can I see you tomorrow? You are going to tell me the rest, you know. Do you drive every afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Then when and where will you pick me up?"

He got her eyes again and held them until she stopped smiling at him. Then repeated the question word for word. She answered mechanically—

"At four, at the park entrance."

Young Dan got down and swept the lady a profound bow, one of his best performances, feeling at once elated and sore. He would find out what the dancer knew about Slater's Summer disappearances, and he would show her he was not a child to be played with.

But that was not all. Even as he watched her drive away he was conscious of a feeling of things coming; he was sure he was to get into strange new places—do things he had never dreamed. Such foreshadowings are not rare at his age and leave no deep impress. By the time he had taken his afternoon work-out at the gymnasium, finishing up with a fencing-bout with young Van Twiller, he was feeling an unmitigated hero.

He did not know that Peter had seen the kissing on the Avenue, and Peter did not mention it until after their shower. When they were dressing in a small, private locker-room, safe from chance listening, then Peter surprised him.

"Wheeler, that scene on the Avenue was very pretty. But if you will forgive me for butting in—it's not safe."

"You mean there's a husband with a gun?" Wheeler asked carelessly.

"Husband, I don't think. But I've got inside facts about the Walling case. There's no doubt about it—young Walling was shanghaied or worse, soon after he was seen with this Buerthe woman."

"Probably he had too much money on him."

"I tell you I've got inside facts. I saw you this morning. You'd have deserved a licking if you hadn't done just what you did. But it got on my nerves and I went snooping around. I've got a chum with a look-in at the Central Office, and this came straight. The papers dropped it because they got word the story was 'loaded,' but a man on the *Planet* gave me the same dope; so you see there's somebody with money and influence behind this thing."

"Of course. I know who he is," Wheeler answered gravely.

"Honest? Who is it? Do you mean you know the name of the man who killed Walling—or had him killed?"

"Certainly."

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"Who?" Van Twiller paused with his shirt half over his head.

"Listen!" said Wheeler in an impressive whisper. "You tell me, and I'll tell you!"

"Some day you'll know this is no merry jape." Van Twiller emerged very sober. "Moreover, I can tell you the name—it's Potter!"

"Poison Potter?"

"The same—then you did not know all along?"

"No—remembered hearing the name—that's all. I'm not losing any sleep, thank you."

"I don't expect thanks. You never get it, you know."

Peter was rather cool, and Wheeler walked round the bench to face him.

"You will take that back, some day. If I ever get a chance, I'll prove I mean it. Remember that when the time comes. Shake on it!"

Peter never forgot the thrill in the grasp of the smooth, perfect hand, so perfect as to look almost feminine, yet with a force in it that was more than muscle, nor the look that went with the pledge. To this day he can bear witness to the fact that even at the age of eighteen Dan Wheeler had a presence not to be forgotten—a power felt by all who came within his reach or looked in his boldly handsome face.

WHEN he waited for the dancer at the entrance of the park the next afternoon, Dan was more carefully groomed than ever. She was prompt, and fascinating in a fur-trimmed coat, and she sat in a speed-wagon or light, narrow buggy that made it necessary to sit delightfully close and snug.

She held out to him a daintily gauntleted hand, smiled, and said precisely nothing as he squeezed in beside her and the bays danced off through the park, shying at nothing and shaking their heads in play. She hummed to herself and to him in a way that assumed perfect intimacy and trust, but answered not a word to the few questions he asked, until they had come to a comparatively unfrequented part of Riverside Drive.

Moreover, she let the horses do whatever they thought they wanted to do, and it was after they had grazed hubs with a passing carriage that he got her to speak.

"Let me drive!" he said suddenly, and took the reins with one smooth, quick movement.

"You are afraid to ride when I drive. Are you afraid of everything, then?"

"Absolutely—live in a continual shiver of fear."

He urged the horses into an easy trot, watching her out of his eye-corner. He saw that she was regarding him intently, and eagerly trying to feel his mettle. There are two subjects on which a woman can not jest—two things about which her intuition is at fault because she feels too deeply. One of them is physical courage in a man.

"So you are a coward," she said slowly at last.

"Sure. Why did Slater want to leave me behind, and how did he know I was going to follow him? What is he going to do, and how do you know all about it? Tell me the whole thing."

"I will tell you absolutely nothing!" She closed her lips tight.

"Now let's see how they can move!" he said irrelevantly, and flicked the horses into their top speed without turning his face toward her.

The broad driveway whirled under the slender cobweb wheels, and the wind of their going pushed and whistled in their faces. Wheeler put up the whip, took the reins in his right hand and slipped the left around her waist.

"*Lâche!*" she hissed, twisting her lithe body as far away as she could. "You prove you are a coward—a boor!"

"Sure!" he assented cheerfully. "Tell me about it now?"

"Never!"

He only held her to him the more tightly, and turned his face to hers, but with head flung back she glared defiance, struggled in silence. His eyes full on hers he bent his face nearer. Her hand darted into her bosom—came out with a little gleaming revolver—pressed it to his chest. Still he drew her closer to him.

"I will—I will shoot!" she gasped, and as the amber-green eyes came nearer, larger, "I will shoot!"

But under the cold, benumbing look that held her, the hot hate was dying within her. Closer still gleamed the long, green eyes. They seemed to swallow her whole as she felt the firm, young lips on hers, pressing hard and cold—and she did not shoot, for her hand refused to work.

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Swiftly he loosed her body, swiftly snatched from her the little gun and, still holding the reins in a firm, right hand, he pointed it over the horses' ears.

"Still—be still!" he hissed, and fired.

Again and again the pistol cracked its spiteful charge, five times, while the horses tore into a mad and madder gallop. Then he dropped at their feet the empty weapon and again crushed her to him with a clasp of steel. And all the time he never took his eyes off hers. She felt she never could escape their numbing weight.

Cliffs, river and broad road poured past—poured past and under them to the wild hoop's rap-a-tap, the ever wilder shriek of the rushing wind. Still one iron arm held her tight, the other kept taut the humming reins. The horses' fright became blind, frenzied terror.

Behind them the light buggy careened and flapped like a fluttering pennant. But the fierce, tiger eyes with the long, level lids never left the girl's wide, black ones, until at last her whole body relaxed against him and her head bowed forward on his chest.

Then he let her go and set himself slowly to calm the mad team of runaways. By a miracle they had struck nothing yet, by another he got them stopped without damage and turned their heads toward town.

THE city lights were twinkling and winking at the warm June dusk as they passed Grant's Tomb, and not a word had broken the silence between them. When he had released her she had made herself neat with a pat and a shake; then she had sat gently leaning against his shoulder, now and then stealing a submissive look at the wild, clean profile of the young face beside her. So young and fiery-wild, yet mercilessly hard and cruel it seemed, and at each look she let herself go, settled against him more warmly.

At Grant's Tomb he spoke.

"Did Slater tell you to keep me in town?" he asked, and as he felt her shrug he repeated, "Tell me!" sternly.

"No. It was not Slater?" she answered softly.

"Potter, then?"

"Yes."

He felt her tremble, looked round, and she turned to him a face so softly yielding and trustful that his start of surprise raised the heads of the fagged horses by an involuntary jerk on the reins.

"Are you afraid of Potter?"

"But why not? He is strong—as you are strong. I have fear of him always. But now—you will protect me—*'c'pas?*"

At the utter trust of her upturned face he flushed and thrilled, saw her flush, then pale in answer, and his head whirled.

He had acted on impulse, with reckless, fierce resolve to show this contemptuous woman he was not a child to be trifled with. His fiery recklessness, his explosive power, had carried him on until he had "blown up" as he would have worded it—and look at the result! He had not known how to discount the girl's Gallic abandon, and her sudden, utter surrender dazed him for the moment. Then all the man in him rose to the occasion.

He was swept off his feet for the moment by her appeal, intoxicated by the sweet, yielding offer of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen—all his for the taking—until his protective manhood got the upper hand. He had never in his life attempted a caress, but he patted her hand as it lay on his knee and said:

"Never worry, little girl. Nothing is going to hurt you, and I'm sorry I frightened you. You're safe with me from now out—be sure of that!"

She looked up into his face eagerly trusting, all faith and submission, then caught up his hand with infinite grace and kissed it!

"Here! What the—" he fairly shouted as he snatched away the hand as if it were burned.

Crimson to his hair he looked from her to the hand, then at her face again, now smiling with challenge and mischief.

"Oh, M'sieu W'eelaire!" her voice was rich, reproach in its facile inflections. "Where now is your masterful power? You look like—like the boy you are. And—so do I!"

"So do you what?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Like the boy that you are!" she whispered in his ear, proud of her command of English. "And now I will tell you something, if you will be a ver' good little boy, and give me something first!"

With a dainty, birdlike tilt of her little head she offered her red lips. Wheeler was grateful that it was in a dark spot, shaded by a passing tree.

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Then, with occasional mischievous interludes in which she enjoyed his young embarrassment, she told him something. In fact, he had never heard so many things in so short a time—things that changed the run of his thoughts and the course of his life.

He sat staring straight ahead with the far, fierce look of the cat-family in his greenish eyes, asking barely a question. Now and then his thin lips quirked as if in contempt for his own stupidity.—Before the dancer had half-finished her story, before she had brought it to the personal finish that all women's stories must have, he interrupted her by a gruff:

"——! Get up!" He started up the tired horses with the offhand explanation, "I can get the eight-o'clock train for Montreal."

The girl, for she was in her first twenties in years, if old in Eve's wisdom, swallowed her protest after a look in his face. After a silence she asked with an uncertain tremor in her rich voice—

"You will come back to me—soon?"

He felt the passion in her tones, for he had at times his own intuitions, looked at her with an impersonal, passive stare, and said gravely:

"Potter will come back to you first, with a bigger roll. Cheer up!"

She shrank from him as if he had struck her. He had, with a cruel weapon; for nothing hurts like the truth.

When they reached the house where she lived she was in tears, but she uttered no reproach, only repeated her question—

"You will come back to me?"

"Perhaps!"

With his low, old-fashioned bow he left her on her doorstep and hurried to the station to catch the Montreal Express.

The woman looked after him wistfully, and turned to face the task that has been hers through the ages.

ON HIS way Dan lay awake and a-tingle, fitting his new knowledge to the things he knew before—learned from his reading and from Slater.

He had learned, in brief, that there have been men in all ages who knew not fear, whose hands would not fit the plow nor their backs bend before those in high places, yet would they not wear a menial's livery and they refused to starve pleasantly; so these men were called knights-errant or adventurers and the people spoke them fair. Later they were called highwaymen, and men of substance berated them, in whispers.

Time passed and property became sacred; and the men of adventure were called hard and harder names—outlaws, robbers, crooks—because they would not regard as holy the laws made by those who had stolen, in order that they might not be robbed in turn. And now the time was come when many believed that the gentleman-crook was as extinct and legendary as common honesty, that he no longer existed, except in cheap fiction and poor print.

But Dan knew that gentlemen-crooks still lived, for Slater had introduced him to one or two, and they were very human, also very much alive. What Dan did not know—and what Cécile Buerthe had told him—was that Slater's vacations for years had been spent in playing this rôle himself, and playing it to the admiration of the profession. In fact, he had made a name for himself in more than one department of the art of separating the loot from the lollop.

The dancer had showed Dan a ring set with a diamond-encircled emerald that had been a part of a world-famous collection in London. This beautiful jewel she prized more highly because Slater had given it to her, and more especially because he had got it at the risk of his life. For Slater entered the game with his eyes open, with the clear purpose of a clean getaway at all hazards—a determination never to be caught alive—and it was this that gave the game its final, satisfying thrill for him. Jem Slater was a born gambler, as well as a born gentleman and almost an entire man.

La Buerthe had told Wheeler that Slater and Potter had left New York by different ways, to meet in Montreal for a venture known only to themselves. This was a thing that Slater often did. When he heard of a job sufficiently attractive, he would associate himself with another professional or amateur whom he knew to be dependable; and Potter, though not strictly dependable in all respects, had a name for keeping a verbal promise to the letter.

It was this association with Potter that made Wheeler uneasy and, added to his thirst for things-doing, had set him on his way to Montreal with a note in his pocket from Cécile Buerthe to a man in Montreal who, she said, could give him news of Slater.

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She had scribbled it on her knee in the buggy, and Wheeler took it from his pocket when he was alone in the smoking-room of the Pullman.

It was addressed, "Jean La Vache," with street and number. It was written in French and signed, "Lucile."

I have before me the notes I took, as Dan told me the story of this journey and its outcome. They read like this:

I DIDN'T know what I was going to do when I started, but I was going to do it; and whatever it was, it had to go off with a bang. I was young, and strong for a stage-finish. Besides, I figured it was up to me to show Slater what a wise old bird I was—that I was grown up and then some. So I was being powerful brainy at that stage of the game, sure not to make any mistake. You get the sketch!

So I was mighty careful when I got to Montreal about asking anybody to steer me to Jean La Vache's place. I picked one of their seldom coppers at last. Then I went to level my eagle eye on the proposition before I bought any chips.

I wish I knew now half what I figured myself at, in those days. Yes—yes!

You know Jean La Vache's place—one of the sights. You step off the street into the café and bar, dance-hall in back—upstairs cards, roulette, and rooms—a big place, where they do everything but say their prayers.

Jean is a big, curly, handsome devil, tall and thick and wide, and all-white under his skin. But it's not wholesome for any man but Jean La Vache to walk on his feet much, and he looks it.

It was evening, and everything going. Jean stood at his desk just inside the glass café-doors. I liked his looks, and stepped in.

He gave me a look, waved his hand, and I slipped him Cécile's note as I passed him. Then I took a seat at a small table and watched him. He never gave a sign that he had got the paper, motioned a man to take his place and left the room through the bar. In a minute he stuck his head out through the door and signed me to follow him up-stairs to a small, front room on the street—his office. He read the note, after we sat down, and said—

"You are a good frien' of M'sieu Slater—a ver' good frien'?"

Something about him got to me and I blurted out:

"As good as he has, I hope! He taught me all I know—been sort of—of an uncle to me, and I know what I owe him. I'm his friend, all right!"

"Then we will shake hands, you and I." And we did.

Then we sat down before he started on:

"He has told me of you, for he is my frien' this long time, but I do not understan' how it is you come to me lak this. You have not seen him—no?"

"No. He doesn't know I'm here."

Then I told him how I got there, though I didn't give fine points on that buggy-ride. He seemed to get wise to that part all right.

"But yes—Lucile hass tol' you what is true. She mean well to you, but listen to me! She will mean jus' as well to M'sieu' Pottair when he is again with her. She is lak that—Lucile. Not that she is false, but a strong man can hol' her only if he hang on, tight an' fas'. Else some other strong man —you see?"

He threw out his hands and shrugged—you've seen 'em.

"That doesn't keep me awake—the girl business. What I want to know is, what's this Potter up to? And what sort of a crook is he, anyhow?"

"M'sieu' Pottair is one ver' bad man to have for an enemy," he says, slow and quiet. "But he play draw-poker with M'sieu' Slater on my plahss ver' frien'ly—las' night only."

"What does he look like? Where could I get a look at him?"

Jean looked me over mighty thoughtful for a minute. Then he got up and motioned me to follow him. He had a little peep-hole at the end of the hall, where he could look into the card-room. He slid the panel and I could see Slater's back not ten feet off, at a table with Potter.

They had been playing, but they were framing up something, and I had a good look at Potter's map while he leaned across the table. He looked like a stiff proposition. His jaw was square, and blue even when he was close-shaved; he moved slow and smooth, and his eyes didn't tell you anything, only you'd better watch 'em. He was putting something up to Slater, and Jem was stroking that long upper lip. I knew how his face looked—lean and heavy-lined, like Uncle Sam without whiskers.

"I don't like it," I told Jean. "I'm going

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to shadow that pair for a while—just in case——"

That big Jean person led me back into the little room and shut the door. Then he talked.

"Do not make a mistake, my frien'! I advise that you do not follow those gen-tel-men. Look you! M'sieu' Slater can care for himself ver' well—ver' well indeed! He is always a gen-tel-man—always. But when he is on one of his lit-tle excursions of his 'Summer Circuit,' he is quick to shoot. See you?"

He was standing, pointing into my face.

"You mean he would let go at me?"

"Why not? He knows not who it is that shadow him, and he will not be arrest'—a thousand time he has said it. So of course he shoot at sight. What would you? He is proud, *homme d'esprit*, with all the world at stake, and he will *not* be take as a common crook. It is so that he get the great excite—so much at stake. But yes! Be ver' sure he will shoot—*sacré*, quick *an* straight!"

I hadn't thought of that, for a fact, but I was young. And he got me some "excite" myself. I stiffened up.

"But how do I know this Potter isn't fixing to double-cross him? I guess I can take a chance or two."

I had got his eye by now and he blinked for a while before he got going, but when he did get started he went some. He took it by the other end—the fix Slater'd be in if he did wing me—how it would spoil his life. And I saw I had got both feet in it. Now he'd go and blow the whole thing to Slater. Perhaps I didn't have to do some ground-and-lofty lying to bring him around!

I got him in a chair and fixed him with my eye, and I put all I had in me to work, to impress him with what an all-round winner I was. I want to remark it was some contract!

Well—I won by a whisker. I never would have tried the hypnotic stunt if it hadn't been for the way it had worked on the girl, and I'd heard that Frenchmen made good subjects. Maybe I felt I had him going! Well, I got him—made him think I could take care of myself, and I promised all kinds of things. He not only promised not to tell Slater, but to help me keep out of sight.

He gave me a swell room in his place, and maybe he didn't take good care of me! There was something more to it than bluff, at that. Jean La Vache and I did fit right at the start, some way, and he's all right. For all I had to keep close in the house the next two days, I didn't have such a bad time. Slater was staying at the Windsor and Potter was staying with a woman at a private house; so during the day I could move around with Jean. He told me this Potter had lived in England a good deal, and his record was a mystery. He was tight-mouthed and made few friends among men—he'd brought his name "Poison," with him, as far as anybody knew—and always had a big roll in his clothes. That was about all.

The second night after that they both took an afternoon train for Burlington. Jo put me wise, and fixed it with the baggageman to let me ride with the trunks—saved me a cold trip on a rear platform or on the brake-rods, for I wasn't missing any tricks and I was going on that train, believe me! I always believed in luck, my luck, with a good push to help, and it stayed with me on that trip, straight enough.

They almost caught me once, when they got off the train. They headed for a lumber-yard to wait, and Slater's flashlight didn't miss me by a yard, where I was behind a pile of boards. I dropped on my face and broke a stick. I could hear my hair grow for half a minute, while they took a good look, and it felt like half an hour.

Then they put in the time waiting for it to be late enough, down on the lumber-dock. They smoked and talked, and I grew old and got jumpy. The trouble with me was that I hadn't any plan and it got on my nerves. Here I had got to make a splash, a big one, and I didn't see myself in the part. I wasn't there to just trail around after them and then go home, and yet what was there to do?

I wanted to wait until they had opened a safe or done their porch-climbing, and then take the stuff away from them. That would have just about suited me. But young as I was, I knew better than to try to hold up that pair by my lonely. Yes—yes!

Just one thing I shut my teeth on—some way, somehow I was going to make Slater sit up and listen, show him I was out of the kid class.

For want of action I wriggled around where I could hear what they were saying, after a spell. What do you guess? Politics! Slater was lecturing on the gold standard, quoting Mills and Laughlin, old stuff but

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good. He didn't leave bi-metalism half a leg to limp on, and left Bryan both sides of the road. I thought it would be daylight before he'd quit.

Then they started. Say, their guns looked mighty business-like in the moonlight, when they whirled the cylinders to make sure. Potter put on a mask, but Slater said nobody'd believe his face if they saw it—they'd think they were having a nightmare. He had a map like Punch.

They took out of their grip a rope, a strap with snaps on each end, a roll of sticky fly-paper, some screw-eyes and two small sacks. Then they left the grip in the lumber-yard near the track, where they were going to jump the up-train, and started for the town; not a jimmy nor a pinch-bar—nothing. They had me guessing good; and scared? Wow!

I took Danny by the ear and walked him after those two, with his knees playing the bones like an end-man. First I'd lose 'em for a while, and then I'd almost run over 'em. It was raw shadowing, but luck stuck to me. We stopped in the back yard of a brick block on Church Street—it was a bank, all right.

There was a diamond-and-emerald brooch that Slater had got wind of, in that bank for safe keeping. And it wasn't in any safe-deposit vault at that, for the bank didn't have any. It was in a has-been steel safe. Slater was a wizard at feeling a combination—none better—and that brooch was his meat. All this I found out afterward.

They piled boxes high enough to reach the wood sills of the second-floor windows. This floor was on the street-level in front, on account of the hillside. Then they screwed two screw-eyes into the sills and snapped the strap into these. That made a belt or sling—see?

With that belt around his waist Slater stood on the top of the lower windows while he hack-sawed out a bar, plastered fly-paper all over the big glass and broke it without a jingle; that's all easy. You take a glass-cutter—Slater had a diamond ring with a point—and draw a square on the glass, then a cross, corner-to-corner, stick your paper tight and a jolt in the middle brings it out in four clean triangles. It's all done in a minute.

When Slater'd got the sash up and his rope-ladder fastened, he called in Potter, who was watching at the mouth of the alley, and they cleared away the boxes so they could make a quick and quiet getaway by the rope, in case of trouble. Then they went inside and got to work, both of them. Then I knew for sure it was my lucky night.

BOTH inside and nobody on watch! It wouldn't happen again. I lay low for a spell and then swarmed up that rope. That's what it is to be young and a glutton for trouble. I reckon I had one of my spells when I blow up and don't know a thing. Anyhow, there I was peeking into that window, and I see why Potter is inside.

He is watching, under the counter in the bank proper, the front room, while Slater is working at a safe that stands in a jog of the passage between the front and back rooms.

The lights are on in the front room, but the back room is dark except where the light shines through the passage, and in the back room is a big table with an old-fashioned green cover almost down to the floor—just made for me. I didn't believe it myself until I was under that table.

At that, I must have crunched a bit of glass on the bare-floor border around the thick rug, for Potter gives a hiss and comes back to poke his head out the window. I could reach his leg as he passed, where I lay under the heavy table. Give me credit, I didn't—I waited for a hunch. And I wasn't even nervous any more. Why should I be nervous?

Here I was, right in the middle of things, with a certainty of getting shot if I made a noise, and a fair chance of being left to be pinched and run in for the whole job if I lay low and kept still long enough. Man, I was living! It was worth all the trouble to get there.

Potter pulled in his head and cat-footed back to the front. Slater stuck his suction-stethoscope to the safe-door again and went on turning the knob, slow and careful one way, then the other. It kept up right along, for so long I began to ache and feel foolish again. What was I going to do for a dramatic climax anyhow?—that was the question I'd been dodging all the time. And it didn't do any good to have faith without facts.

Well, I had come so far without sense or judgment; I bit on my teeth and trusted to the luck of a crazy Indian. I knew that I

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was due to blow up before long, then things would sure happen.

The tumblers clicked right—again—and once more. The big door swung open and Potter came to help Slater divide up.

I got a glimpse or two. Potter was taking most of the currency in his bag, and I saw Slater flash the big stones before he put 'em in his. They swung-to the door and made for the window. Slater went down the rope first, while Potter watched out.

The two bags stood on the floor at his feet under the window. I could almost reach 'em without moving.

About then I was where I had got to do something crazy—a grand stand finish. I was just getting my knees under me for a jump at Potter, just on general principles—with some fool notion of putting him out, and taking his plunder, then following Slater in Potter's mask—when I saw that Potter was opening one of the bags on the floor. He was going to hold out something on Slater.

I held my breath and watched. He was after the big brooch. When he got it out I could see it flash in the light from the front room, then he put it in his pants-pocket.

Now I had an excuse for butting in. I didn't know then that the brooch was worth all the balance of the stuff, and that it was Slater who had been on its trail for a year. But I knew that the crook was giving Slater the worst of it and I was fit to bite nails, primed for a blow-up. I shivered as I watched.

Potter tied up the bag and pulled up the rope-ladder to let down the bags one at a time; they were heavy. He let down the one he had robbed first, and while his head was out of the window I saw my big act all made-to-order.

I stretched out and got the bag on the floor, pulled it right between his feet and under the table. His head was still outdoors and he was whispering to Slater. You could hear him a block. They must be dead-sleepers in that town. He said:

"I'll bring down the other in my teeth. See if the alley's clear."

He pulled in his head and felt for his bag of loot.

"Where in ——"

He was growling, and pawing the floor in circles, wider and farther. His hand hit the hanging table-cloth close to my face.

"Slater!" he rasped, head out again. "Slater. You been doing any your —— parlor-magic? What you done with the other bag? *Who's* a liar?"

Then he put on the soft pedal.

"Well—why wouldn't I holler? Gone, I tell you! Sure I'm sure! Ya-as, you grinning lollop—didn't I bring one in each hand? Think I swallowed it? I'll go look. You come up and see."

He turned to go back to the safe. Slater was coming up the rope. It was my cue to come on, and I went to it on the jump.

POTTER starts past the table on the run—I reach out one hand and trip him. Before he strikes the floor I'm on his back and soak him behind the ear with my right. He goes to sleep like a baby.

I have just time to drag his head around toward the window, face to the floor, pull off his mask and put it on myself, get his gun from his hip and sit on his back facing the window with gun leveled, when Slater's long smiling map slides up above the sill, like Punch in the show.

"Sh-h-h!" He's saying, low and sarcastic, before he heaves in sight.

"Want to call out the militia? You make a noise——"

"Don't move! Or off goes your block!" I growl in deep bass and shove the gun under his long nose. "Now listen! I get an even share of the stuff or blow the game—see?"

"Good evening. Cool for this time of year." He smiles and says smooth as oil.

"Pardon me," he says, "but I believe you have the advantage of me?"

"You're —— right I have!" I snaps. "Do I get a third, or do we all do time? Get action!"

He always had a grin that would rattle a mud-turtle, and he is looking right through that mask to where I'm blushing. He has me going, and I talk too much.

"An even break is your only play to win, and my finger is getting jerky—talk some!"

That was my miscue. He spots my voice.

"Why, it's our little Danny-mite! Blown up again! Well—well! Welcome to our little picnic, Danny-boy. Help me in."

He holds out his hand and comes a step higher.

Of course I feel about six years old by now, and I pull him in. But I keep my seat and watch Potter while Slater stands over me and reads me a fatherly lecture.

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"You have imagination, Dan, I give you that. But I gave you credit for more nerve. I thought I had trained you better.

"Whatever you do, son, don't play a piker-game. You've already got half, why dicker for a third? Haven't I told you to ride your luck hard while it's running? Why not take the whole works? But Danny, don't be a brute. I'm afraid you've hurt our friend. Don't do that Potter! He's a bad Indian—as like as not to cut loose!"

"Come in and shove your hand in his pants-pocket," I says. "Lie still, you rattlesnake!"

I had to thump Potter with the butt of the gun I'd been holding on Slater, and I gave him a good one. He wilted. Then I rolled him over and got up.

Slater came in the window and stood looking at me for a while mighty solemn. I never had seen him look like that. With his eyes on me he gave a kind of a moan.

"My God! What have I done?" As if he was talking to himself.

"Nothing—I did it. Frisk him!" I says, and Slater's mouth twisted.

He went through Potter and found the brooch, stood looking at it, then he drawled:

"Well, Danny, if you insist on taking your share, it might be well to collect from Potter before he wakes up. He's more than likely to be peevish."

I got the bag under the table, poured out the money on the cloth and made a quick division. I took a good third, all right, and put the rest back in Potter's bag.

"What will I do with mine?" I said.

I hadn't got it out when Slater handed me his bag.

"Put it in there and keep the change. This is what I was after." He put the brooch in his pocket. "Unless you insist on holding me up for this brooch, too?"

I could feel myself turn good and red. Then I choked, felt like a fool. If Slater had looked at me another second I'd have played baby right there, but Potter groaned and sat up just then.

Not a word said.

He got up, staggered to the table, grabbed his bag and got out the window, holding the bag in his teeth.

Slater and I followed, still not a word said until we got to the lumber-yard, when Slater laid a hand on my arm.

"Not too close! Potter is a knife-thrower."

We got where they'd left their grip and Potter took it. Then he came back to us. In the moonlight he looked like the devil. Blood had run down his cheek and neck, and you'd never know his face. His voice sounded like a rusty saw on a knot.

"You—Wheeler—you butt-in on a man's game," he choked and swallowed. "This—your finish—both of you! I take my time. I get you—both—you——!"

Slater had me, both elbows trussed, or I'd have gone to him. Potter acted like his anger had made him sick. He shivered and shook his fist, slow and weak, and made faces at us. Then he reeled off and Slater let me go. He hid somewhere, and Slater said:

"Come look at the moonlight on the lake!"

I was feeling mighty cocky, thought I was entitled to a pat on the back. But I didn't get it. The first thing Slater had said, after he had done some more thinking, was:

"I'm sorry for your father, Dan."

"He's all taken up with that skirt," I said. "He isn't losing sleep over me."

The "old gentleman" was to be married next month to a woman of thirty, after his coin, and I was sore. He made a mistake, and so did I.

Slater read me a sermon right in that lumber-yard. I remember most of it:

"Dan, you have made an enemy for as long as he lives—never forget him for a minute. Never go to sleep nor down a dark alley unless you know where he is. He's as bad as they make 'em. Now, if you're off in this race, it's up to me to teach you all the tricks in my bag. You'll need 'em if you expect to stay to a finish with a crook like Potter—don't doubt me!"

"I beat him once and I can do it again!"

While I was bragging, Slater was looking at me in a way he had. It made your back creep. He drew a long breath.

"Maybe—at that!" he drawls. "When you get the moss off your horns, and your neck gets good and hard, you'll be a lethal dose for an adult man, Danny. You're a promising young buck, right now."

We were waiting for the sleeper back to Montreal, and Jem kept an eye peeled for Potter all the time. I thought he was only fussy, but he was dead right, as usual.

We were making for the track, between the piles of boards, after the train had

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whistled, pulling out of the station, when *s-s-s-s!* a knife hisses past my face and sticks into the lumber close by with a *chun-n-ng*.

"Wait! I want that!" I stopped to pull the knife out, but Slater dragged me on.

"Come along, you tiger-cat! Lucky you haven't got it, in your neck!" he says. "And it won't be the last you'll hear of Poison Potter—you hear me?"

BUT that knife was the last we saw of Potter for two years or more. He made Montreal somehow on that same train, and sailed for Liverpool early that morning. Jean La Vache saw him go aboard—he was there to see a friend off on the same boat—and brought us the news while we were at breakfast.

"Do you know what we are going to do, to celebrate?" Slater asked me. "I feel like school is out for Christmas, and we got to make history somehow."

That didn't mean any common red-paint nor booze. Slater didn't blow-off that way. So I figured it meant travel.

"New Orleans?" I guessed.

He liked that town and it was far from Burlington, Vermont.

"No. We'll take a little run down to Burlington! I hear they had a bank-robbery there last night. The papers say there's some excitement—reward offered and all that." He was stirring his coffee and reading a paper beside his plate.

Well, that's what we did. It was the best part of the show for Slater to hear the man who knew it all tell him all about how it was done, and he standing with his hand in his pocket fingering the crisp bills that came out of the box he had opened.

He was a shabby-dressed little man, and he stammered when he got excited.

"S-s-s-see them screw-eyes up there?" he says. "That's how they held on—s-s-s-stuck fly-paper on the glass, s-s-so it wouldn't make no noise. I tell ye they was s-s-s-slick ones!"

Then he got us off to one side and sputtered in Slater's ear:

"S-s-s-say! They could g-g-git 'em now! Look-a-here!" and he shows us a mark in soft earth; I knew it for my shoe in a second. "Gig-gig-g-get the man that fits them tracks, and you got 'im!" And the little man's eyes pops out.

"You must be a New York de-tec-a-tive!" says Slater in a whisper, and looks scared. "Don't tell anybody! Here's the man!" He grabs me. "Put your foot in there, Danny, and go with the gentleman without any fuss!" He turns on the de-tec-a-tive. "But you know too much about this business for an honest man—you try your foot in there." He held on to him tight. "I know the Chief of Police. I think I'll collect that reward myself!"

Jem could look mighty harsh. The little man danced and sputtered. He was scared.

"Now you've stepped on that track and spoiled the evidence, but I have a witness," says Slater.

That little cuss almost cried, for there was a crowd to join in by that time, and he got us off out of the way to tell us his troubles. He had a family and no work—all the old stuff. When Slater gave him a new yellow-back the cork came out for fair. He leaked something scandalous, and I saw his neck and shirt had been washed. He was no hobo—the real goods. So I gave him another X. They do get up against it, now and then.

II

THAT ended the narrative for that time. As he finished, Wheeler showed no mawkish sentimentality over the little man in hard luck, nor did he regard twenty dollars as a generous gift. All his vivid life he practised the professional gambler's free-handedness. His pockets, usually full, were always free to anybody who asked. If the beggar was actually in need, he got all he dared ask for; if he was a professional he got a bonus proportioned to how well he played the game. Dan was not troubled by scruples about pauperizing anybody.

"A man grinds or grafts," was his analysis. "One man in five earns his money and the other four graft it away from him. What's the odds whether you dodge the law or defy it? You steal, whether you water stock, sell bum goods or open a 'box.'

"It's just a question of taste and nerve. I'd rather steal from one big crook that has got too much, than skin a dozen poor lollops with sick kids at home."

That was his off-hand formula for conversational purposes. If you had time and the education, he could translate it for you into syllogisms based on orthodox axioms in political economy, using precise English,

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just as he could set me right on questions of dosage and chemistry, after three months' access to my text-books.

Dan was very much alive—there was not a dull nor an idle cell in brain or body—alive and in his dangerous fashion keenly enjoying it. So ignorance was a pain to him, and learning was the line of least resistance. He learned as he breathed, because he couldn't help it.

We come now to the period of his life when he learned most rapidly and consciously how to take care of himself, to develop his talent for handling men so as to take from them what he wanted, and to do it with the skill and imagination that made of his work a fine art.

No man living was better fitted to act as his tutor and companion than Slater, and between the two there grew a rare bond. Followed three years of delightful activity, while Poison Potter was abroad. During this time the New York brokerage office seldom saw the pair between April and November, and even in Winter there were mysterious business trips to call them away.

All this time Dan was not only getting the moss off his horns and hardening his neck, but he was learning men and women and how to manage them for purposes of fun or revenue, and getting much of both. Slater, on his side, took his task of training the youth of his adoption very seriously. Moreover, every day added to his admiration for and delight in his pupil-companion. He found him a continual surprise as an athlete, at any game of skill, a wizard at any game of chance, and a demon with any weapon—including his marvelous hands. For Wheeler's admiration of the older man I have his comment on Slater before me:

"A gentleman, clean as a hound's tooth, without a shade of yellow. He trained me as an all-round athlete, and to quit winner at everything. A large order, yes, but it had to be filled! He made me a boxer, sure-shot with anything that would go off, taught me to use foils, single-stick and saber, to throw a knife or rope—even to use a silk-cord—and had me taught Jap-wrestling, Greco-Roman and shoulder-holds—and that's only a part of it. He taught me all there was about man-handling—how to handle men single or in a bunch, stand-up or street-fight—all he knew. And I never saw his match.

"We covered the country from Boston to 'Frisco, and took in fairs, field-days and circus-days, doing the doings and skinning the skin-games—nothing got by. Slater would enter me as a dark horse in athletic events, sprints mostly, and clean up at long odds. Then he'd go after the gun-and-grip-sack artists and leave 'em clean. Many's the time I've seen him divide with 'em fifty-fifty when they put up a pitiful holler. But if they went to their hardware they were due for a spell of sickness.

"A demon on the draw, and a knife didn't even give him a chill. He always winged his man at that. In those three years he never had bad luck but once—he got a marshal out in Nevada, and we had to cut out that section after that. But it wasn't Slater's fault. They had it framed to finish him and there was no other way out.

"We lived, those days, believe me! Not a dull number on Slater's program—not a dead one in all his bag of tricks. And we didn't mix with crooks, not any. Slater's friends were among the finest, and his were mine. We weren't troubled with lonesomeness so you'd notice it, for we had the kale loose-rolled, and notions to go with it. It's a hard combination to beat anywhere, any time.

"We didn't get the law over the wrong shoulder very often at that. If Slater wanted something bad enough he went after it, but he used brains. He never started on a shoestring—went after something worth while, had his plans right, and then went to it like the cold demon he was. No, you could not get him. It wasn't to be done."

Extravagant or not, the description fits the man who made it, at the time when I knew him, only Wheeler was the more dangerous by reason of the hand that life had dealt him. For the end of the three golden years with Slater brought trouble—trouble thicker and deeper. It was trouble that seared and hardened, embittered and made of Dan Wheeler the most dangerous of all living things, a super-criminal with a fearful power over men—and women; and with no regard for any controlling force from within or without. And that is putting it very mildly.

Potter came back. He reappeared in New York, quiet and confident, with money to invest. Soon he had influence with the machine and political friends in the organization that ran the city. Outside certain

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shady circles he had never been known in Manhattan as a crook, and now he became known as a man who had the ear of Boss Collins.

Slater and his young friend, Dan, did not mix in politics, but the older man saw a menace in Potter's moves.

"He's laying pipe to get us, Dan. It behooves us to walk mighty upright in Gotham. It might be well to become as pious as Boss Collins himself."

"Not if I've got to be as yellow a cur on the sly as Collins is," was Dan's answer. "Perhaps Potter has lost his nerve—he's never looked me in the face. Not once, though I've given him the chance three times."

"That doesn't mean anything. He's the kind that crawls—crawls, but never lets up. I wouldn't wonder if he got me, Dan."

The last was said thoughtfully, as Slater chalked a cue. They were playing billiards in the place of their old friend, Jean La Vache, in Montreal.

Dan was startled at the words, and still more by the manner of them, so he leaned over the table to shoot.

"Take some calomel, and forget it!" was his off-hand advice, and he missed his shot by a hair.

Slater came around to that side of the table, and as he viewed the layout and rapped the chalk off his cue he spoke low and with lips barely moving.

"We've been shadowed in New York. Now I know we're shadowed here—the small man shooting at the pool-table. After this game come to my room. I want to tell you something."

"A bad case of liver. I tell you you want to cut out that nightcap."

Wheeler kept his pose of carelessness, but he had never seen Slater in a mood like this, and followed him to his room in the hotel with a feeling of depression.

Outside the gambler's sure faith in luck, Dan had few superstitions; warnings and such were not among them. Yet Slater's mood so impressed him that he never forgot that game of billiards, nor Slater's words as he put his cue in the rack. It was years later that he told me. "A good shot to quit on."

"That was what he said when he finished his string and racked his cue. And it was a long two-cushion carom, and it was Jem's last shot—at anything."

"DID he know it?" Dan went on. "I pass. He didn't act like himself on the way to the hotel. He took me up to his room and tried the doors and windows to see if anybody was listening. Then he sat down and said:

" 'Dan, if I pass out there won't be such a lot of money left for anybody, but enough to take care of my little girl—the kid you have never seen, the one in the convent school. Judge Cowan will handle it for her and be her guardian until she is of age. Your father's friend, and a square man as men go, is the judge. Now the judge has got a little souvenir for you in a little envelope that won't be touched until you call for it. It is not much—I have tried to fix you so you can get what money you need, when you need it, anywhere. But what I want you to do is this—promise me to ask for that envelope if you're hard up against it—sick, strapped down to your last nickel or anything like that; and not until then. Promise?' "

" 'Yes. Is that all?' I couldn't get away from it. He was talking level.

" 'No. And the other is harder. Promise not to go after Potter while you're hot!'

" 'I don't get that—while I am hot?'

" 'If Potter gets me and you blow up—go after him in one of your bad Indian spells—you'll probably get him all right, for you're possessed of a devil at such times, but you'll wind up in the "chair" or worse. Promise me to wait until you are cold before you go to him, and I'll back you against any man or combination. Promise me that, Dan Wheeler, for old sake's sake.'

" 'I'll do that, too. And—is that all?'

" 'That's all, but just tell it over to me so you won't forget any of it.'

"We talked a few minutes, then he rang for his Martini. A cocktail is no kind of a nightcap, but he never drank more than two-thirds of it. He was no hand at hard liquor at any time. Then I went to my room. I felt bad.

"I saw the boy taking Jem his cocktail—he came up the back 'lift' that was for the boys and chambermaids—and at the end of the hall somebody stopped him. I heard some talk and turned back just in time to see a small man slide around a corner. I thought of the 'shadow' in the billiard-hall—I wish now I had followed it up and asked the boy about it—but I said to myself, I was excited and seeing things. So I went on

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down to my room on the floor below and went to bed.

"The next morning Slater didn't answer when I knocked. I went in, and he sat where I left him—cold and stiff.

"He hadn't undressed even. His watch—an old key-wind family relic—hung from the chain in his lap, and the key was in his hand. He had started to wind it when the prussic acid got him, and he never knew what hit him. It works like that.

"Yes, half the cocktail was in the glass, and it had enough acid left to kill a dozen. The little yegg made a clean getaway, while I was lying awake the night before, and there was nothing to lead to Potter. I got back my senses in time to see there was no use raising a holler, and had the whole thing hushed. The papers got it heart failure, and the body was taken back to New York.

"Next came my father. He didn't live a month after that. It was apoplexy, but it wouldn't have come for a long time if it hadn't been for crooked work. The woman got away with a good slice of what he had—gone with her pal a year before. It was a dirty mess, raw work. But the old gentleman was breaking—easy meat for the pair of cheap crooks who worked him. And they were not worth spoiling an appetite. I passed it up whole.

"But Collins and his gang of strikers got in their work, with the law and the machine behind them, and they skinned him clean. All legal, understand, and on the level—as friendly and nasty a piece of stealing as ever was pulled off under the cover of the law and the courts. They were all friends of the old gentleman, sure! All except Potter, and his name didn't appear on the honor roll.

"I fixed things up so the old gentleman never knew. It was all I could do for him, and I had quite a roll laid away, for I had seen this finish coming. So he died thinking Boss Collins was a good friend to him. The old hypocrite was a pall-bearer at the funeral, and he was a corking mourner. That was the last time I was inside a church.

"Part of the time I was in a sort of trance—stunned. I didn't feel anything, walked around with my eyes open like a sleep-walker. Then things got to me with a rush and I'd feel too much, as long as I could stand it. That is how I figure it, that I don't remember Slater's funeral at all, and I can see the inside of the church at my father's—priest, altar, candles and all—just as it was. Only I don't see 'em moving. But all this doesn't get anywhere."

So spoke Dan, green eyes coldly reflective.

He didn't know it, this young athlete with the green fire in his tiger eyes, but he was taking the last jump in his jerky growth to man-size. His emotions were stretching him, and it hurt. It was characteristic, however, that all this time he unconsciously kept himself better-groomed than ever. On the street people, men as well as women, turned to look after the young swell with the startling power in his set face; and some of them went back to turn for another look into the greenish eyes with the long level upper lids, just for the thrill they got when they met their ruthless, far-looking glare.

JUDGE COWAN sat in his library with a clean desk before him, thinking of the end of his old friend, John Wheeler. The judge was sorry that he had not been able to save more of the property, for he had not dared offend Collins and the machine to which he owed his own position and prosperity.

He had met young Dan on the street that very morning. He had not looked dissipated, and the judge had noticed that Dan had his mother's strange hypnotic eyes. Dan would have to go to work in earnest now, unless—the judge recalled the envelope that Slater had left in his keeping until Dan should call for it. It was like Slater, odd. Perhaps he had left the boy some money, although it felt like a photograph.

Here Dennis brought in Dan Wheeler's card.

When the young man entered the judge no longer thought of him as a boy, because of the stern repression in the thin lips. And the eyes made him feel a bit numb and ill at ease, so that he said as he sat down an empty formula—

"Well my—Dan, you have lost your best friend."

"Yes, both of them," Dan answered. Then, as the judge's glance fell before his and seemed to inspect his clothes, Dan went on quietly: "No—I don't wear black. Collins wore black. That's what I came for—they cleaned him out, got all he had?"

"You mean? I don't exactly understand."

The judge crossed his legs and failed to appear at ease.

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"I know that woman got all she could, then Collins and his gang of grafters stole the rest. What I want to know is——"

As he paused, standing with face grim and eyes fixed in a cold stare, the judge suggested—

"Won't you sit down?"

Dan did not hear, and asked in a lower tone:

"Was there anything left? The house—mortgaged for all it was worth?"

"About all it will bring, I am afraid. But if I can be of any——"

"Then what I want to know is: Is there any chance to land Collins and the rest—land them in the 'Pen'?" Again his voice was cold and hard as steel.

"No fraud could be proved," the judge said ponderously; "even admitting that anything illegal has been committed. I strongly advise you, moreover, not to talk too freely."

"Then the law," Dan went on coolly, "won't touch Collins for robbing my father any more than it did Potter for poisoning Slater. That's what I wanted to know—I did know, but I wanted to hear *you* say it."

"Under present conditions," the judge severely announced, "it is unwise and dangerous for you to talk in that way about either of the gentlemen you have mentioned." And he uncrossed his legs to sit up to his desk.

Wheeler did not notice the move of dismissal, did not even wink as he said:

"Under present conditions? That means that if *I* had the pull and the money instead of that gang of crooks, I could send them up or kill a few? Is that the idea?"

"It means that, as things are, you are more likely to see the inside of the prison yourself by using such language. You understand I want to do all I can for your father's son, and if you are temporarily embarrassed——"

"I have money enough, and I can make more. When I can't, I'll ask for what Slater left here."

Although he interrupted the judge, Wheeler's manner was quietly respectful. Moreover, he had not even twirled his hat or moved his feet since he took his stand opposite the desk, and the judge admired self-control. Also, the reference to Slater reminded the judge of something.

"You have never met Mr. Slater's daughter?" He spoke as if it were an afterthought, but watched the young man keenly. "So she tells me."

"No. So she is here—with you?"

For the first time the grim young face softened the least bit, and showed interest quite human.

"Can I see her? I get along with kids all right, as a rule."

"I think so."

The judge hesitated, seemed about to say something, then rang for Dennis.

"Dennis—any one waiting in the office?"

"Yes, sir. Mr.—a gentleman to see you."

"Then show Mr. Wheeler into the reception room. Tell Miss Margery he is waiting to see her, and show the gentleman in here. If there is nothing more—nothing I can do for you now?"

He got up and turned to Dan with something almost a smile on his face; even held out a hand.

"Nothing, thank you. Good afternoon."

Dan Wheeler spoke still with grave respect, but did not see the hand. He bowed his graceful, old-fashioned bow, and followed Dennis into the room across the hall.

Dennis closed the door behind him before ushering into the judge's presence—Mr. Potter.

WAITING—in the gloomy reception room, Wheeler was thinking there was much formality about letting him see a child. Slater had never taken him to see his "little girl," and Dan turned when the door opened, expecting to see a child in short dresses—perhaps with shy finger in mouth. He saw a woman, and a woman that brought his heart into his throat while the blood flamed to his face and burned it.

Long afterward, when men and women spoke his name in a whisper and with quickening pulse, Dan Wheeler would blush before a really square man or a pure woman. For they were the only living beings who commanded his respect and admiration, and in their presence he was always keenly sensitive. The man with power and manhood *plus* stands always abashed in the presence of mysterious and lovely maidenhood. And Dan Wheeler was at the height of his virile youth at this moment.

The girl before him, fresh and fragrant as roses, had black, black hair; and her delicate face, though sensitive, was strong.

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The mouth in particular, ready to laugh or cry, showed her father's depth of humor as well as an innocent pride that made an appeal—an appeal to manliness and honor. There was also a one-sided dimple at times. But that was too much, simply gratuitous cruelty.

It was the tremulous little smile that struck Wheeler—a brave attempt to be cheerful—as she held out her hand and said softly:

"I have wanted to see you, Mr. Wheeler. I tried to think what you would look like." It was clear she had imagined a fairy prince.

He was not even surprised himself when he bent over the little hand and kissed it. He did it well—atavism, perhaps—and stood up to say gravely—

"I am sorry for you now."

At his simple, earnest pity she at first dimpled. Then the double meaning of the words, under the circumstances, with the power of his presence, made the great dark eyes fill quickly.

"Don't!"

She turned away. At the grace and charm of her as she crossed the room to a chair and sank into it, he felt he must do something, everything to protect, comfort her. He held himself still, the very hardest thing of all, and sat down at a little distance. He looked at the window until she said—

"Shall you be here in the city—long?"

The voice was sweet and steady now. He answered grimly:

"I leave tomorrow for Denver. I know a man not far from there on a ranch."

Although he knew that his first look into those big dark eyes had shown him a whole new world of wonder and beauty, he knew most certainly he must get away from her at once and for good. And every look at her would make it harder. She was speaking very softly—

"I hope you will like it, and be—happy."

"What do you—" He spoke at random; it was hard to breathe. "Do *you* like it, here?"

"Not New York. Though they are good to me—Uncle Charles and Aunt Agatha—but I hate that Mr. Potter."

He felt himself freeze stiff, and heard himself ask dully—

"Does that—does he come here—see you?"

"Yes. Uncle Charles—he isn't really my uncle, you know—wants me to be nice to him. I have thought he was afraid of Mr. Potter. Yes, he comes here very often. He is with Uncle Charles in there now. You—don't! Please don't look at me—like that!"

For the one instant that he had caught her trusting look, his fierce cold glare had stunned her. She passed her hand over her eyes, dazed and frightened.

"It's foolish, of course." She tried to smile up into his face as he came to her. "But I felt faint and weak just then, and it seemed as if your eyes hurt me. Now they don't. I wish—I wish you weren't going away."

"So do I!" He stood up, stepped back a pace. "But I must go—now. Just remember this: Potter won't hurt you. If he tries—I shall come and get him. Now I will say—good-by."

As he said the words with the slow monotonous tones of a somnambulist she looked up at him with absolute trust. She stood up, still held by his gaze, and only whispered—

"Good-by!"

He turned from her, hands clenched by his side. Leaving her with her hand outstretched, he went from the room and closed the door behind him. Only in the hall did he lean for a moment against the door, breathing as if he had been running. Then he hurried from the house as if afraid of something in it, intoxicated, filled with a frozen fire.

In the first-sight mutual confidence between him and Margery Slater he had told her the truth. He did have a friend on a Colorado ranch, but his resolve to go to him had been formed the instant before he had announced it. His decisions always were lightning-quick and sure, and as unchangeable as his promises. He had not thought out in detail the reasons for going, but he was going, tomorrow. In the meantime—

You will not care for this chapter enough to want it prolonged. Even as I had the story from the thin cruel lips of the great gambler, crisp with his biting, sardonic humor, I did not care for it. He got through it, though, at a gait I can not beat. Let him tell it:

WHEN I left the old house where the Cowans have lived from way back, I was going to go tell Boss Collins some things he knew but didn't want to hear—among them, that I was coming

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for him some day to get him right. I don't know why I ducked Potter—it wasn't because I was afraid I'd start something before I was ready—it may have been my word given to Slater, that seemed a long time ago. But I went to Collins' headquarters and found he was down at the beach at a shore-dinner of his four wards. They were celebrating the election. They'd made a clean sweep—get that "clean"! And all his gang were there. All, that is, that could make a bluff at using a fork, and they didn't dare put on the table any but cheap plated-ware, at that.

It's useless to talk about what I ought to have done, or what would have happened if—It's past and done now, and nothing but sudden death would have stopped me from going to Collins. I had some remarks that I had to get off my chest before I could sleep, and I had to look at the old —— while I was doing it. So I went down there to that shore-dinner after him.

It was held in a small hall over a roller-rink, and there was a small stage at the back. I found a rear entrance that got me into the wings of the stage—had to pick a lock to get in, and there I was all alone, where I could look right out across the empty stage over the long table. It was all lighted up and decorated—the table on the same level with the stage or a bit lower, and the end of the table not more than six feet from the front of the stage.

I was just kid enough to enjoy the chance to make my first appearance on any stage. It was all set and ready, the curtain all up, and the audience seated. I felt around until I found the switch that turned on the foot-lights, and waited for my cue. It couldn't have been fixed better.

There was old Collins, back to the stage, sitting at the head of the table as toast-master. I could almost reach the roll of fat that bulged over his collar in the back—and didn't I want to reach it!

There was speechmaking. They patted themselves on the back and called themselves high-sounding names, and the Boss got up to make a speech himself. He rapped for silence and waited until they all hushed.

"In our hour of triumph," says he, "let us not forget a debt of admiration and gratitude we owe to one of us who is no longer with us—a man who was an example of honesty and loyal friendship, as I know too well." Here the old scoundrel got out his handkerchief. "No man ever had a closer friend."

Here he gets a fat quaver into his throaty voice, and I switch on the footlights. The The stage flashes light as day. He is the only one that doesn't see it, and husks right along—

"My heart—is too full——"

"So are your pockets!" I shouts, coming down-stage to the footlights.

He twists half 'round and drops into his chair, fat mouth open, while I go ahead speechifying to the crowd. They're eating it up.

"So are your pockets, full of the money you stole from your dear friend, John Wheeler, my father. You stole him poor and hurried his death. Every man here knows it, and most of you cowardly crooks had a hand in the stealing. If there were such a thing as a square deal in the law you'd all be wearing stripes and eating prison stew tonight. Sit down!"

I pulled a gun from each hip and the stir subsided. Waving the two guns for emphasis, I says:

"Any man who wants to see how Dan Wheeler can shoot—let him stand up! Now, Jim Collins, you are the biggest thief and worst crook in the lot—the one I hold responsible—and some day I shall come back and get you for what you did to my father. Don't you doubt that! Not now, because you are not ready. You still got to pile more black sins on your dirty soul! Not now—hell's not fired-up hot enough for you yet! But some day—as sure as there *is* a hell—I will come back and send you there. —— you!"

I was glaring down at him, and half-twisted in his chair he gawped up at me like a stuck hog. There wasn't a sound for a while, then I heard a sneaking step behind me. The copper on guard in front had left his place at the front entrance and stolen around behind.

I was cut off from my retreat. Besides, I hadn't made enough of a splash yet, and I was due to cut loose. I did.

I jumped for Collins—planted one foot in his face, and as he went backward I plumped the other foot into his round belly, hard. I heard him grunt as I jumped on to the table and yelled:

"Down and crawl—you curs!" *Bang!*
"Under the table and root—you hogs!"
Bang! Bang!

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I let go with the guns right and left, and pranced down that table, a wild Indian, and glorying in it. I'd aim at the next head, let go loose so the jump of the gun would clear it, then take the next. And I cleared that table from end to end. It was pleasant while it lasted.

But the bull was on my trail. I heard him breaking dishes behind me between the reports of my six-guns. And the end of the table was my finish.

I jumped to clear the man in the end chair—he'd gone flat on his back and was howling "murder"—but I caught my foot in the chair and went to the mat with it. I turned an ankle, and at the same instant Mr. Copper landed me one good sideswipe with his nightstick just over the ear, and it was good night, Danny!

I wasn't among those present any longer—I was out for fair. And then it was their innings. Every man under that table must have crawled out and gone to me like the pack of hounds they were. They kicked me the length of the hall, kicked me down the stairs, kicked me into the street—kicked one another's shins in their itch to sock in another good one. A fine time was had by all.

I KNEW nothing about the last scene until I woke up in the Tombs, some sore—yes. But my bones were all there, barring a slat or two, and I could see a little out of one eye.

I couldn't eat, and didn't get the chance for a few days—not until I landed on the Island. And perhaps prison-stew with musty bread didn't taste good! Only I didn't keep it five minutes. I don't know why—God, He knows I wanted to. But that doesn't come in here. I gave my name as David White in police court, and got six months in the Pen on Blackwell's Island.

Six months in the B. I. Pen!

You know something about it, Doc, but it was as much worse then. And remember: the word was passed along to the warden and screws that I was to get the full course with all the trimmings. I got 'em. At that, it was the prison clothes and being chucked in with the scum of the city that left the sorest scar. Doc, I'd give you every inch of my hide for skin-grafts—without ether—if you could take away the memory of that.

Well, we will skip through it, just hit a bump here and there. They put me in the quarry at the start, of course. I limped out in lock-step with the rest of the line—you know how they smell. But work? Not Dan! The screw in charge of the gang started in with a careless kick, just by way of introduction, and didn't even take a good look at me until I started for him.

I can see his flat face now, when I jumped in. He was paralyzed, and I got in a few good ones before they got to me with their clubs—they carried long clubs like nightsticks then. I had another nap then, and woke up in dark cell with irons on my ankles—chains and an old round shot. It was the bad ankle puffing up around the irons that brought me to, I fancy.

You wouldn't pick that for sensuous pleasure exactly? It's the plain fact that that ankle—the pain of it—was about all that kept me from going mad. Then I'd faint after a few hours and get a rest.

I don't know today how long I was in dark-cell—lost count of the times they changed the water-can and lime-bucket while I was feverish and delirious. But some time during the fever I was taken up to hospital, and the irons taken off.

As soon as I could walk, I was sent down. This time they put me on the chambermaid gang, cleaning cells and corridors, and my job was filling water-cans and changing lime-buckets. How'd it happen I got it so soft? You'd not guess in a thousand years—Cécile Buerthe!

Yes. She was back in town, and of course Potter bragged to her that he had landed me. She got fifty to the Dep—what? Sent fifty dollars to Deputy Warden Stokes—I'll try to talk United States a while—to let up on me when he could.

Stokes wasn't so bad, and he did what he could. But one day along came old Hall, the warden, and recognized me. If I'd had a grain of sense I'd have ducked into a cell, but I suppose I was due to blow up again.

I had seen the pot-bellied old brute toddling around, a thick cigar in one end of his big, sloppy mouth, punching the crooks with his heavy cane and grunting like an old boar. It was one of his cute little tricks, and it got to me. It made the hair on my neck bristle and my knuckles itch.

That day I saw him coming, and I stood still like a fool. He jabbed me once with that thick stick. Grunt? I slammed that big black cigar and one of his front teeth so far down his fat gullet you couldn't

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reach 'em with a boat-hook. He couldn't cough them up.

I got one good look at him, rolling and kicking on the floor, clawing at his purple face, wheezing and whooping and whooshing out smoke and cigar-ashes, before I sprinted up the narrow stairs to the first-tier gallery and down the length of the tier. I'd seen Mangan—a screw that had been horsing me—out of the corner of my eye, and I wanted one lick at him while I was going good, before the others got to me. He was in front so I took down the narrow gallery to get him alone for one second. As soon as I saw we had a lead on the others, I turned and got his throat in both hands. It felt good.

It wasn't a second, perhaps, before the rest got to me, and we went over the iron railing to the stone corridor below—me still swinging to his throat—and landed into a howling pack of screws that had run along the corridor to head me off at the far end. They did a good, thorough job of clubbing—and back to dark-cell again with the irons on.

When they took me out they kept the irons on me, and I was wheeled out to the quarry in a wheelbarrow, dumped out on the rocks, and wheeled back to a cell at night. Work? Not for any dirty screw that was ever whelped!

I wouldn't even lift the irons to get into my cot in the cell. My cellmate, a big husky pirate, doing three months for "moll-buzzing," would lift me in, irons and all, without hurting my bad leg.

"You got 'em buffaloed, boy," he told me. "Just give 'em the cold eye, and their livers melt. But look out for Meakin—he'll do you dirt some day behind your back."

Meakin was the screw in charge of the quarry gang I was in. I would lie out there and think what I would do to him if I ever got to him, and it made him nervous. He couldn't keep his eye off me, and he couldn't look me in the face. But one day he got another screw to back him up, then he came behind me and gave me the boots.

"Get to work, —— you!" he says.

They tell me I sprang the length of my chain like a coiled snake, and got him under the chin, heavy enough to drop him. The other screw had his revolver ready to club me, but even when I was flat on the ground—the irons tripped me—I got his eye, and he stood like a man frozen, gun raised like the Liberty statue.

Meantime my brave Meakin picks himself up, heaves up a big chunk of rock and tries to smash me with it. He only got my leg, the bad one of course, and broke it.

Dark-cell again for me. They dragged me by the chains on my leg and flung me in, unconscious, because I fainted on the way, just like a woman. I was losing my strength, see?

When I came to I set the leg myself. I wound the chain around the other foot—the break was above the irons—then by straightening out the good leg I figured that I could pull the broken bone into place. I couldn't pull hard enough or straight enough by hand. After three or four times trying, with fainting-spells in between, I got it into place. Then I went to sleep from the relief.

That was the last I remember for two weeks. I was taken with a fever and sent to the hospital some time in that fortnight, and there I stayed.

Yes; somebody had stirred things up in the department, and there was a sort of an investigation of the prison generally. Hall left, and Stokes took charge. I don't know if it was my case or not; but, anyhow, I was kept up in hospital even after I got up, and fed some decent food—compared to the prison-stew. I had three months to get well, and to think. I owed that to Cecile Buerthe, too.

I expect, Doc, you'd say that right then I did my first conscious cerebration—what? It came mighty left-handed at first, but I got somewhere before I finished.

Starting at the scratch with the proposition that it was me against everybody and it was up to me to win, it didn't take long to see that I had got to make the most of what I had to fight with. I had to have health, strength, and front. What—front? A bluff, appearance of a winner. Nothing succeeds like success, and all that. I had to make the most of my strong points and the weak points of the other fellow. I began right off.

I liked the hospital keeper—the screw in charge of the ward—as much as the devil likes holy-water; but I practised on him, and had him eating out of my hand in no time. I knew before that I had a bad eye on me, but I found out I could do more with my hands.

I could stroke a man so he'd purr like a cat—all that magnetism stuff—I don't need to tell you. But I found I had to handle

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myself so I could feel the way I wanted to feel. I hadn't got hold of your man James' book then, but I had had some good hard licks to drive in the main points of this self-control business. I learned a few things in those weeks, and I made some plans—they were not half bad.

One thing was dead sure: I had enough of the underside. I was going to *live*, not simply exist, or slave for some other mud-headed crook. If I had any fun coming to me I had got to collect myself, and any man who stood in the way must watch out for his own hide. Potter had to be fixed some way, to start with.

I found out by the crooks' underground telegraph that Potter had been behind all that had been handed to me—that he had spent a lot of money to land me, that he still had a strong drag with the organization—and he was still on my trail. I had to lay plans accordingly, and I did.

Yes, I doped out several campaigns for the time when I was to get out. Every one of them with as many variations as a game of book-checkers—what I would do if things went wrong at any stage of the game. And every one of those plans was different from what Dan Wheeler would have done six months before, for I went out of that training-school for crooks a different citizen, don't doubt it.

No doubt Potter thought he had me now—all he had to do was to keep the bulls on my track, and I'd be back in the Pen. again within a month—and from now on I was a cheap crook, while he—he'd be a respectable member of the machine, with both fore-feet in the trough all the time. That was about his program. And that was where I was due to fool him, for I was through with stripes. No more prison-stew for mine.

I went out with one solid notion, as solid as the principles my father had, and that was, I'd take any man's life, even my own, before I'd go back to that!

If I couldn't live a life worth living I was ready to quit right then and there—only I calculated to give 'em a run for their money while I was quitting, believe me!

III

SO DAN WHEELER came out of the penitentiary more dangerous than ever, because absolutely unbound by anything—bound by no obligation, hampered by no scruple or fear—and with his own special gift, his marvelous explosive virile power, no longer a source of weakness, but a mastered weapon in his wizard hands.

Even his desire for revenge was not permitted to handicap him. He was prepared to wait and scheme, if necessary, until he had money and influence, before he went after the men he wanted.

And in the meantime he was not any stage villain enveloped in a cloud of gloom, with jaw set and muscles tense for a spring. That meant indigestion; and he had the sense to know that he must get some fun out of his daily work if he was to flourish and succeed.

If his fun looked tragic from the other fellow's viewpoint, that was the other fellow's hard luck. He was going to have it and enjoy getting it.

In his travels with Slater he had made one friend whom he could count on—one "Slim" Garnet, ex-crook and now ranch-owner in Colorado.

He knew that he would be welcome on the ranch. A letter in his pocket told him so. And if he could furnish a few thousand dollars for a half-interest, there was a newly discovered ore-body on the premises that looked like big money in a short time.

His plan was to get out of New York, the nest of his enemies, for the present. When he again should set foot on Manhattan Island, things would occur.

Before leaving the city, however, he intended to call on another retired gentleman of fortune, "Old George" Gresham, for the latest bulletin from the upper crust of the underworld, as well as to get the real facts of the machine control of New York—what wires were just then in operation, and who was pulling them. It might be that he could make a quick stroke that would furnish him with the cash to help develop that mine.

It was Dan Wheeler all over, to even think of spoiling the Egyptians, when he would be lucky to get out of the city alive—for that was what it amounted to. Potter and his hirelings, with machine support, would do all they could to put him back in the prison that, for him, was worse than death; while he was resolved to go to the electric chair before he would do another "bit."

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IT WAS early of a bleak November morning when Dan Wheeler stepped from the old *Monadnock* at the foot of Eleventh Street. Though he knew a "shadow" must be waiting to tail him into new misfortune, though the first sullen cold of early Winter cut through his thin Summer clothing, he was fairly drunk with freedom and young manhood.

In his pocket was almost two hundred dollars which he had when he was sentenced; in his brain was the knowledge of men and how they were split off from their money, following centuries-old lines of cleavage; in his blood was the fire of youth and the love of living rapidly. The world was before him to be pranced upon, and he did not know the sensations of indecision or of fear. Let the world watch out.

Yet at a distance there was nothing in his looks to mark him as the man whose name was one day to raise goose-flesh on the backs of all English-speaking constabulary, unless it was his smooth, light-footed gait, with the least suggestion of a limp. So it was necessary for the plain-clothes man on the job to meet him on the cross street to get a look into the startling clean-cut face and tawny tiger eyes, before he was sure he was tailing the right man. So he was doubly surprised, after following to the Grand Central and aboard a Croton local, to be suddenly faced by the same disconcerting glare, just as the train slowed up for 125th Street in the tunnel. He was held by an instant's paralysis, while a tense voice with a thrill in it said:

"Go back. Tell your boss you're a flivver!"

The plain-clothes man did that very thing. When he entered the awful precinct where sat the great Barnes, that demi-god took one look at his sullen and downcast face and remarked quietly:

"Walked right up his back and fell over his collar. Never mind the hard-luck story. Soak your head until it won't dull a diamond drill, then tell your troubles to Potter—they don't interest me."

"Then—I'm fired?" He was a new man, so his voice shook.

"Not yet. We need a horrible example."

Then the man blurted out:

"How'd I know he was a demon, with green eyes that would fell an ox? You—I was told he was a greener, a new crook."

"Any man in this office when I count three is fired. Find Potter!"

To Potter the sleuth began where he left off in the office: "He turned off the lights in the car and made his getaway in the tunnel as the train slowed up for 125th Street. He may be at Tarrytown or the South Ferry now. How can I tell?"

"You can't," said that heavy-browed person. "That would take a teaspoonful of brains."

And Potter departed to take it out of Barnes, over whom he had a club to enforce subservience. It is a good place to draw a veil.

The one hunted was between the two points mentioned, outfitting himself in the one place where ready-made clothing can be had that looks as if it was made by New York's most conservative tailor. He left there to go to the Oriental for a hair-cut, Turkish bath and massage, and when he appeared on Broadway more girls looked at him than ever before at ten A. M. Dressed and groomed to the minute, he not simply knew and felt, he actually was, more Dan Wheeler than ever—radiated more of his peculiar dangerous power over women and men.

Old George Gresham, grizzled and fresh-colored, had just put spoon to grapefruit at his special table in the "Morton House," when he saw this radiant being bearing down upon him in tow of a servile head-waiter.

"Well—well, Danny, me boy! Ye're good f'r the eyes—a ten-time winner! Have ye eaten? Sit down—give the lad your coat!"

He reached a welcoming hand and motioned to the seat opposite. Wheeler took the hand in a gentle grip, but did not surrender even his hat to the waiter that had come running.

"George," he regarded the older man soberly, "have you got fifty to lend me right now, with no security?"

"I have that."

His bill-book was out on the instant, but a smooth young hand pushed it back toward its pocket.

"Put it up. I was feeling you out." With the words Wheeler sat down and gave the waiter hat and coat. "Bring me the same."

And when the man was gone he looked up to meet the sharp glance of the older man.

"Well, how are you betting?"

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"Lad, ye're a mind-reader! I was just feeling sorry for ye when ye came in, but now I dunno—I dunno! Ye've been growing up on the Island. What's happened ye?" George narrowed admiring eyes.

"They did all they knew to break me over there."

"They've not finished yet, Dan!"

George leaned over the table to whisper and tap the table with emphatic forefinger. Dan waited until the waiter with the fruit had withdrawn, and asked:

"See anything that looks like a C. O. Dick hanging around? I had to shake one before I came here."

"Nobody but the regular hotel man, and he's going out. While we are alone—have ye enough kale?"

"Yes."

"Do ye pack a gat?"

"No."

"Good lad! What's yer plan?"

"I leave for Denver tomorrow night—going into partnership with Garnet."

He did not add, "If I can raise five thousand dollars."

"Danny—" with a quick look all about, the old man urged—"take the next train. New York is not healthy f'r ye the day!"

"I know it, but I stay until tomorrow night."

The old man said not a word until the waiter had come and gone again, then:

"For the love o' heaven, boy, wink! Crack a grin! Give the frozen face of ye a vacation. Ye give me the shivers. Is it Potter that's on your chest that heavy—or a ger-rl?"

"I am not going after Potter until I am good and ready, and when I go after Potter I shall get Potter!"

Dan dropped two lumps into his coffee with a smooth steady hand.

"By ——! I believe ye!"

It came out with unconscious fervor as the old man watched the movements of Dan's hands—unhurried, but with the silent quickness of light—fascinated. From them he looked up to peer long into the level-lidded eyes and feel their benumbing power before he put the question—

"Lad, are ye going to play fair, or crooked?"

For the first time Wheeler's thin lips curled:

"You mean, am I going to graft under cover of the law or in spite of it? It's just a difference of nerve. A man can earn day-wages; if he gets more he's robbing somebody. I don't fancy carrying a hod, so I am going to get money—somehow. It looks like more fun to steal from some fat crook who has more than he can use than to 'go into business' and rob poor wops of their wages. One thing sure, George, I *live* from now out. No more striped suits or prison-stew for Dan. And I don't count ties. I wear clothes and ride in a Pullman, and Jones, he pays the freight!"

"God help Jones!"

It came out with such sudden doleful relaxation as the older man dropped back in his chair, that Dan's face broke up like the coming of Spring, into a slow smile that showed just the edge of his white even teeth. It made something that in a woman would be dimples in his cheeks, deepened the cleft in his bold chin. Men even were agreed that Dan Wheeler was dangerously handsome when he smiled, which was rarely. Women didn't say anything—a bad symptom.

"Well, lad!" Old George sat up after feasting his eyes for a bit. "Ye are out of my reach. I'll not even give ye more advice. But I wish ye were out of New York and half-way to Denver this minute. Though it does my old eyes good to be lookin' at ye—and that's the truth!"

After a short pause the old man asked—

"Have ye seen Jem Slater's ger-rl lately?"

"No."

"She's worth seeing."

"She is."

Wheeler's eyes were on his plate, and his voice was very low. There was silence for some time, broken by the older man.

"Danny," he whispered suddenly, "I believe on my soul there's a central office Dick just come into the office."

"I have finished anyway. I will go out by the side entrance. Good-by!"

"I'll not be seeing ye again, lad? Ar-re ye sure ye want no money—nor annything at all that I have?" He held Dan's hand and looked up wistfully into the bold, alert face. "The Dick will not see ye for a bit. He's chewin' with the hotel man."

"Yes, tell me—was Potter behind the whole show? Is Collins anything but a catspaw?"

"Nary a thing but Potter's hired man. And so was Cowan, the solemn hypocrite. Good luck, Danny!"

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The old gentleman gave Wheeler the gambler's lucky-touch on the back as he left, and looked after him muttering—

"God, He knows ye need it, lad!"

NOTHING could show more plainly the way Dan Wheeler went about things than his next move. He had not found out just how much influence Potter had in high places because his talk with Old George had been cut short.

His first thought then was to go straight to headquarters and ask the great Barnes about it. But, in Barnes' place, he reasoned, he would not admit that he was taking orders from any man. Moreover, it was some distance to Barnes' office.

Why not go to the Big Boss of all—the ruler of all New York—who was only a few blocks away? Why, of course! And he was already on his way.

The Calif of Manhattan had his apartments over a famous eating-house. There he slept and ate in sacred and costly privacy, and few of the sovereign people dared even try to get access to him. It is very meet and right that we who make freedom our unholy boast should be trampled by a despot of alien strain without shadow of popular choice, without pretense of "Divine right," and bare our silly necks with meekness.

But Wheeler drew near to the holy of holies with no heart-flutter, and gave unto the doorman his name and a dollar. He also favored that keeper of the portal with one of his near-smiles, which caused him to report that the young man named Wheeler "looked like he might be somebody."

So Dan was shown up a soft, dark stairway into a sunny room where the Big Chief was taking an after-breakfast survey of scare-heads. The great man lowered his paper enough to cast a keen look at the virile grace that stood before him. The young man did not smirk or cringe, but looked straight at him out of eyes that knew not fear. The boss knew the feel of a male man, and he felt it now. He growled—

"Well, what do you want?"

"Five minutes of your time."

"Take it. Go ahead."

No invitation to sit down, and Wheeler did not even wink, but went ahead.

"My father, John Wheeler, was robbed by his friends. Some say that this man, Potter, framed the plant, and some hint that the organization—your organization—needed the money. Did you get it?"

"Not a cent!"

The big man was sitting up now, and as he thumped the table beside him, his paper slid to the floor unnoticed.

"Then it was Potter."

Wheeler's piercing look held that of the Big Boss like steel to steel as he bit off the crisp words:

"This Potter person has come too fast. He is due to come up against something hard. He got me six months, and tried to get me croaked in the stew. He's still on my trail, and I want to know just this: Does he give orders to all the police department and the central office? And would Barnes weep bitter tears to lose him?"

"Young man," rumbled the chief, narrowing his cold blue eyes, "your father was a loyal organization man, and I admire your nerve. But why should I tell you anything? How do I know how you will use it?"

"Thanks. That's what I wanted to know. You have got all you'll get out of Potter, and he's becoming a nuisance, but Barnes doesn't dare turn him down cold. That means that if Potter should die of heart-failure tonight it wouldn't be a fatal blow to Barnes—provided the papers don't make a monkey of him."

"Young man, are you looking for a job?" asked the chief after a moment's thought.

"Not now. I go West tomorrow night. When I come back, perhaps!"

"Then I'll give you two words of advice—and you'll not take 'em—go tonight!"

"Thank you, Chief. Good morning!"

And when he walked briskly from the room, leaving the chief looking after him thoughtfully, Dan had taken only four of the five minutes allowed for the interview. But in that four minutes he had not only found out what he wanted to know, but he had changed his plans and got himself tuned up to concert pitch.

He was ready to strike the gait that was to make him famous. He walked like a conqueror, and in his face was open challenge to the wide world. In this mood he paraded Fifth Avenue in the clear sunshine for more than an hour.

In exalted moments such as this he had to make an effort not to think of the fresh and fragrant presence of Margery Slater, the girl he had seen but once. She was a being of finer stuff, not to be profaned by

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the approach of common clay; and he had no place in his scheme for such ethereal divinity. He did not put it to himself thus clearly, for he was not of the introspective, analytical sort. He simply shied from the thought of her, with a hurt in his chest, while at the same time his feet took him unconsciously to the house of her guardian, Judge Cowan. He looked up at the silver door-plate with a catch of his breath.

Since he was here it occurred to him to ask the judge for the packet left in the judge's keeping by Slater. It must be of some value, and if he should be forced to leave town that night—it was now near mid-afternoon—it would be as well to have it in his pocket.

He no longer believed in the judge's honesty and, if he was a tool of Potter, he was not to be trusted with anything. It never occurred to him that even the most depraved criminal could harm Margery Slater. For him she breathed a different air, lived on another plane, out of reach of harm.

She was far from his thoughts as he climbed the stone steps and rang the bell. His face was coldly menacing, and he stood very still watching the heavy door before him.

STEPS within, a click of the lock, and the door swung in. In it stood Margery herself. In a plain dress of greenish olive-gray that made her slender rounded figure look tall and accented her delicate coloring, she was like a moss-rose.

At first, pale with sudden fright before his threatening stare, she put a hand to her breast with an indrawn breath. Then the rich blood came to her face and round throat in a rush as she recognized him.

"Ah—Mr. Wheeler." She offered both hands. "You frightened me, and I am so glad you came. I was thinking of you, and I am all alone—only the cook is downstairs. Come. I need some one to help me, and I was wishing you were not so far away when you rang the bell. Come and sit here, in the window. When did you come from the West? And where is your tan, and your big, broad-brimmed hat?"

She had drawn him, like a lifelong friend, into the drawing-room and seated herself beside him as she talked. Her sweet rich voice, the fragrance of her, dazed and half stunned him, left him throbbing with a delight that hurt. He had just sense to realize that he was supposed to have been on a ranch in Colorado, while he had been in the Penitentiary. It struck him as rather quaint.

"I bleach out fast," he explained automatically. "I have been in town since this morning—only."

"To stay? Say yes!"

She leaned to him with such frank eagerness, and she was so sweet, that it made him dizzy. Right then and there he made his decision—there was no place in his life for anything so lovely and pure. His jaw tightened as he announced heavily:

"No. I have to go back—tonight."

"Oh-h!" She shrank as from a blow. "Don't! Why do you look like that? And I had hoped—I wanted some one to help. I suppose I was foolish." She bit her lip to keep it from trembling. "I have no right to bother you with my troubles. But you knew my father, and I have felt—I feel now that I have known you so well. Isn't it strange?"

She tried to smile, a brave, tremulous attempt. Somehow the trust in the great brown eyes banished all his embarrassment, and when he spoke, his low tones were vibrant with power. He gathered up that look in his own compelling glance as one would pick up a child in arms.

"Tell me—everything!"

And with a long sigh of content she told him.

"I *knew* it would be all right if you were only here. You are so big and steady and—fearless. Nobody else is like that, not even my guardian, and of late he has not been himself. He seems afraid of something, and that is what makes it so hard to know what to do; because he has been so good to me, and I must make any return in my power. This is what I mean."

She gave a frank account of the situation and of the happenings of the last few months. Potter had posed as a friend of the family and her humble suitor, apparently leading an admirably virtuous life. But the Judge had grown thin and worried, finally admitting to the girl that he was in serious trouble and that her marriage to Potter would be the only thing that would help him out. He would explain no further. She feared Potter, and in his absence loathed the thought of him, but when he was with her he had over her a kind of

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strong animal's power. He was a darkly handsome brute, with a peculiar magnetic attraction that made nine women out of ten his easy slaves.

"Uncle Charles says he seems a man of excellent habits," she finished, and paused, her eyes held firmly by Dan's.

"How about young Van Twiller?"

"I like him, and he has asked me to marry him. Ought I to tell you all this?"

"Yes. What did you tell him?"

"That I must have more time—to find out."

"Did you tell Potter that?"

"Yes. But Uncle Charles says that if it is to be in time to do him any good it must be before Christmas; and the engagement must be announced tonight or tomorrow. That is why I am heaping all my troubles on your head in this shameless fashion. Are you sure you——"

"Stop that! Pardon me, I didn't mean to hurt you. Here—look at me again, straight in the eyes!"

For a long minute she looked into the deep amber eyes that seemed to draw and draw as they dilated and darkened. On his part he did not know what he was doing—what a depth of tenderness and power he was pouring into her hungry woman's heart—until he saw the lovely face sadden with yielding, yearning surrender. From the sweet half-open lips came a soft sigh that was part pain, part joy, and all mystery.

"Ah-h-h! What—please—don't," she whispered. The first words came of themselves, and they recalled him.

"Girl, do you believe that I—don't you know that I wouldn't hurt you?" He steadied himself and his voice.

"Oh-h—yes, I know it," she whispered, still held, and still holding the mystery that thrilled her.

"Then listen!" He made his tone hard and crisp, and she winced. "I am going to find out what's behind this—find out before morning. When I know I will tell you. Don't give any promise tonight. Wait to hear from me, will you?"

"I will. I'll do anything."

"If you don't hear from me, it will be because—because I have gone—for good. In that case—get this, now—in that case you tell Van Twiller what you have just told me, and tell him to wait for his answer. Understand?"

"Yes." Her eyes were wide and frightened. "But what do you mean—'Gone for good'? Gone back West, do you mean? Why couldn't you write if you have to leave without seeing me? You will come back—some time?"

It was harder for him to get up from the seat than if he had ball and chain on a broken leg, but he did it and drew away from her. He could fancy the pain was a tearing of ligaments—bonds between them.

"Perhaps—some time, but not soon. I shall be all right. I may see you tonight. Shall you be at home?"

"I promised Mr. Van Twiller to go to the theater with him, but if you will come——"

"No. Go with him." He felt his voice creak with the effort. "If I come, it will be after theater-hours, just before I go to take the train. Good-by."

The hand he took seemed to hold him gently, but he dropped it abruptly, stupidly reiterating—

"Good-by!"

He hurried through the hall, seizing his hat from the rack, and had his hand on the door when he heard her voice, clear and low:

"Your coat! You have left your coat. Please put it on."

She had followed to the drawing-room door, and stood with hands behind her, leaning against the doorpost. He got into his coat, then from the open street door he looked back at her once more.

She still stood with hands clasped behind her, looking steadily with head a little bowed, from under straight dark brows. He closed the door behind him, feeling like a brute.

THE silver plate on the door, "C. P. Cowan," reminded him that he had not got the packet he came for, and his lips twitched grimly as he thought how little his former plans counted for now. Now he had a chance to do something worth while, at least, even if he couldn't get his hands on any money to take West with him.

There were ways to make money out there. He would cross that bridge when he came to it. For the present, if he lived he would see that Potter didn't get the girl or her money, and he would do it before another sunrise.

He didn't underestimate the job. Potter was strong in mind and body, and had

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every advantage of circumstances as well as helpers, yet he never had a moment of doubt or indecision. The first thing to do was to get inside facts and to get inside himself. Potter's men were on his trail and would soon spot him anyhow, so he might as well go to him at once and tell him—

"You can't have the girl, nor the money!"

That would be futile. He dismissed the idea entirely.

If he could get Potter alone—if! That would be too easy. But he wasted no time in impossible dreams, such as using with deadly skill the Eastern strangler's silken noose on Potter's thick muscular neck. It would be silent and sure in his practised hands, and he could see the surprised terror in the victim's popping eyes.

Just then his glance picked up a poster "La Buerthe."

She was dancing at the New Gotham. He had thought of her before, of calling at her rooms, just out of curiosity, to find why she had helped him when he was in prison. She had been the first to make a move to save him from torture, and he wanted to know how much she had had to do with his final relief—the move that had saved his health, if not his reason and his life.

It was probable that she too was still Potter's creature, and would betray him at the word of command. He would go to her, nevertheless, and see what could be done. Perhaps he could use her jealousy; if not—a woman scorned was no easy proposition.

But the whole problem was tough. This looked like the most direct way to get on the inside. He would go to her, even if Potter himself was with her.

He started forthwith for Gramercy Park where the dancer had lodged the season before. When he reached Twenty-first Street, however, he stopped for a moment of deliberation, his tawny eyes narrowed to pin-points; then he went back a few blocks to a surgical supply house and bought a long slender amputating-knife. It was polished like a mirror, of the best steel, and with a razor-edge. When he had got a sheath for it at another shop, he hung it inside his trousers-band just in front of the hip. To do this he had been obliged to go all the way back to Union Square, to the basement of the "Morton House," and as he came upstairs he saw Old George at the bar of the café.

"George," he startled the old sport by a husky whisper, "seen anything that looked like a yegg on my trail?"

"No—forget it!" George turned on him a face flushed and worried. "Have a highball with me, and then hit the rails for the cow-country. I tell you, boy, it's a job for a dozen men you got on your hands; the quicker you pull your freight the——"

"Listen! Where is young Peter Van Twiller right now?"

"At the ———— Club, most like. Have a highball."

"Thanks." Dan seized and drank the tall glass that had just been set before George. "Do you more good that way, George! Time's in a hurry—see any driver you know out there in the line? I got to have a carriage, and I want to know who's on the box."

"Drink hearty!" said George plaintively. "Hope it tastes good. Wait—I'll see if my old standby is out there."

When the carriage drove up to the side entrance, Old George opened the door and whispered as Dan got in:

"It's a bum-lookin' rig, but the driver's all right, only for a bit of deafness. Punch him with a stick. Good luck!"

As the door closed and the carriage rattled off, it seemed to George as if the body rocked and pitched to a heaving disturbance in its dark insides. Quick to alarm, he called and ran after it, plunged into the portly stomach of a bluecoat, and the carriage disappeared in the early Winter darkness.

Meanwhile Wheeler was having a brief but busy session in the jingling old equipage. Entering with his head half turned toward Old George, he was lurched into his seat as the door closed and the wheels turned. Some instinct or unconscious sensation made him throw up a hand before his face at the same moment. It was caught back to his mouth with a snap by a silken noose, and he was in a clinch with a big man who fought with the fury of terror.

Dan himself, recognizing in a flash an attempt at garroting, went into action with savage relief. All day he had been tense with the feeling of being hunted, knowing that at the first chance he was to be arrested on a framed-up charge, if not shanghaied or sandbagged, and here was something to bite on.

One hand slipped inside the noose. With

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a ducking wrench that freed his head, he clung to the cord. Although his man had him by the throat in a fierce grip, Dan lost not a motion in futile scrabbling. His free hand sought and found a face, his thumb slid inside the eye-socket. There was a grunt of pain and the clutch on his throat was gone.

The passing light of a street-lamp showed him a tortured face thrown back in a grin of agony. He struck at the upturned jaw like a stab of lightning, with a body-swing behind the blow, and without a sound the garroter collapsed to the floor of the carriage.

YOUNG VAN TWILLER, fresh from a cold afternoon canter and still in his riding-breeches, sat on a chair-arm in the card-room watching a game of bridge when the club-attendant whispered in his ear. Peter started up to an accompaniment of advice and comment.

"Tell the lady you have friends who will not see you wronged, Peter. She'd best have a care!"

"You big handsome devil, aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Send me word if there's a lady-friend—or a scrap!" The last came from a puny inheritor of corrupting wealth, and the big athlete grinned as he promised:

"I'll surely remember you for the scrap, Monty. But it's more likely to be an unpaid bill."

At sight of Wheeler's face at the half-open carriage door, however, he revived notably.

"Hello—hello! I thought you were punching steers. What the——"

He stumbled over the unconscious form as Dan dragged him into the carriage and they were off again.

"Don't mind my friend. Step on his face—he likes it," said Wheeler. "Can you spare an hour or so? It will pass the time."

"Can I? You have saved my reason. But this evening——"

"I know. You will have time to dress for the theater, and Miss Margery. This is on her account, too, you might say, and it's dead easy. Here, you! You don't come on, yet!"

A head rose from below, in the traveling flashes of light, and Wheeler coolly administered another jaw-jolt that flattened out the floor-passenger once more. Then he addressed Peter:

"Never mind trying to pocket your feet. He won't bite. You know Potter?"

"Met him several times, at the Judge's. Odd, quiet sort of chap, but he——"

"He's the villain in the piece, and some villain—don't doubt it! Here's the bill of fare."

In a few sledgehammer sentences Dan outlined his prison experience and Potter's operations up to date.

"And now he's got the Judge by the short hair and he's going to have the girl as well as the rest of her money—already he's made the judge steal and hand over to him a part of it—and he's going to pull off the announcement tonight. Somehow he's got a notion I'm a hoodoo, and he wants me where I'll stay put. All day I have been dodging his yeggs—this is one of 'em—" he stirred the body at his feet— "and I don't know how many more he's got on the watch. But I thought you might be willing to help a spell—what?"

"Will I? Oh, my aunt! I was born lucky. Tell me about it?"

"Haven't I been telling you! Think I'm a mind-reader? I don't know what he's doped out. Perhaps we can pump something out of Rip, here. Wake up, neighbor, and hear the birds sing!"

He shook the stunned man upright.

"Well, look whom we have here! It's big Mick, the Moll-buzzer, that used to lift me into my bunk with the irons on. *Oh*, Mick! Swim out! Did I hand you a stiff one? Come on then?"

Setting the big limp body on the seat as if it were a child's, Dan removed the handkerchief gag and rubbed the face briskly. But he left the hands still tied until the man came to.

"You—White?" were the first dazed words of the big crook. "I didn't know—this is no kind of a job I want, but we didn't dare turn it down. We'd go back to the stew in a holy minute."

"How many wops has Potter got on the job? And what's the dope? Give it to us straight, and we'll see you out of his reach, alright."

" 'S good 'nough," said the man hoarsely. "There's three besides me. Our job was anything to put you back in the Pen. I was tailing you—never saw your face—and when you went into the Morton House I

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slipped in here to watch both doors. I never had a chance to get out."

"Where are the other three?"

"On Twenty-first—watchin' the dancer's house."

"Where La Buerthe lives? Is Potter there?"

"Some o' the time—nights mostly."

Wheeler watched keenly for the momentary glimpses of the man's face—not a criminal-born map—and after a short pause suddenly asked:

"How comes it you know so much about that house? Come clean now, and we'll buy your ticket to any point you name. How 'bout it, Van Twiller?"

"And give him a fifty to start on if he will go straight," said the sober young blood.

"I'd sell my soul for that right now."

Mick was husky with emotion. Wheeler deftly freed his hands.

"Let 'er roll!" he encouraged him.

"I been keepin' comp'ny with M'rie, her maid; so's Slugger Mike—tried to. But I got the pole, an' 'f I can get to Chi' I c'n get a fat job and send f'r M'rie."

"You get your job, alright, but what d'you know about Potter and what he's got framed for tonight?"

Thus pulled up, Mick scratched his head and rubbed his corded wrists.

"I dunno—you know how 'tis with wimmen. M'rie, she talks a landslide an' I git lost in the fog. Say! I mind last night M'rie says her mistress's got somethin' f'r you—somethin' she pinched off'n Potter an' he ain't wise yet. She wants to give it you. She's strong f'r you, the dancer is!"

"Come now! Don't try any con game!" Wheeler's voice was threatening. "She is Potter's stool-pigeon. If you double-cross me, you will——"

"So help me God, I'm comin' 's clean as I know!" protested the other. "The dancer wants to hang on to Potter, but she's wise to him. She knows Potter's after this Slater flapper, an' she wants to spike it—see?"

"Well—keep going!"

"Yeh. So she figures, the dancer does, that you're her best bet. See?"

"I don't think. Where do I come in?"

"——! The other woman, the Slater girl, is dead nuts on you, ain't she?"

In the sudden silence Wheeler heard an inward pounding. He was thankful for the dark as he growled:

"That's where she falls down—hard. The dancer, I mean. Never saw this girl but twice, and never shall."

"Once is enough, 'cordin' to M'rie! All the wimmen fall f'r——"

"Shut up! Can that, and get to business. What is it Cécile Buerthe has got. Do you know?"

"Checks, M'rie says. Two checks Cowan gave Potter."

"What good are canceled checks? We got no time to go into court."

"They ain't canceled. That's the point. If Potter gits the girl they won't be cashed. He's got 'em f'r a club to keep the old Judge buffaloed, an' make him be good. Cécile she frisks Potter when he's soshed an' puts blank slips in the envelope. But you want to keep an eye skinned if you go to Gramercy Park. Slugger Mike is on the make, and he draws down a century cold if he puts your right hand out of business. He told M'rie that too. An'—I guess that's all—all I can remember. I never even had a hunch who you was, or I'd 'a'——"

"Turn it off! You're getting mixed. What about my hand? Why doesn't he hire me croaked? Potter, I mean. What's the idea in crippling me?"

"Ask M'rie. But she says that's Potter's notion of revenge. He'd rather keep you in the stew than croak you. An' I guess he's dead right, at that."

"That's no dream," Wheeler commented grimly.

"You'll have company, by gad!" Peter commented. "I'm in on this to the finish. Who would think this Potter was such a demon? And this is New York—in the twentieth century!"

"That's just what ails us," said Wheeler. "But here's where you make your getaway. By the time you see Mick off at Desbrosses Street, it will be time to dress for this evening. Get me a ticket to Chi', too."

"Put it up! This is my end," said Peter, as Wheeler pulled bills from his pocket. "And you'll need ready cash if you leave town tonight. And listen—you can't go to that place alone, with three men in ambush waiting to sandbag you. I can't allow that?"

"No?"

Wheeler's tone was suddenly cold and hostile. He stopped the carriage and got out.

"You do your job," he whispered, as he

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held the door and stuck his head inside. "Get me a Pennsylvania ticket. Keep it until I see you after the theater at Cowan's. That's your job—and see Mick off. I've got no more time to bother with you."

He slammed the door and the carriage rattled off.

WHEELER stood motionless, thinking. There were still three men on watch for him around the house of Potter's mistress, and La Buerthe herself. She might be a help or a peril, but those uncashed checks were tempting, if they existed.

He threw up his head and arched his muscular neck. This was growing interesting, and time was getting short. His grim half-smile became more dangerously menacing. At that moment a street-woman caught sight of his startlingly handsome face and approached him timidly with her usual formula—

"Hello, dearie!"

"Brush by, girl, brush by!" he growled, turned away, then wheeled. "Here—Now beat it!"

He gave her a dollar, and, stirred into action, cast a look about him to see where the carriage had set him down. Then he set off again for Gramercy Park.

This time he walked past the house of the dancer, turned the next corner and stepped into a doorway. Soon a tall, lithe figure stole past, and he caught a profile glimpse of a bulldog jaw and broken nose. It was Slugger Mike himself he had picked up this time—known as one of the worst men in a street-fight on all the Bowery, but so near-sighted that as a shadow he was a joke. Dan's lips twitched again as he set off to lead the Slugger a chase.

Up Third Avenue to Forty-second and across to the Grand Central, where he bought a ticket for Albany. He waited long enough for Mike to make sure of the ticket, then led him west, looking for a deserted street where he could come to an arm's-end argument without interference.

In the west fifties he found a lonely spot with a sheltering step to hide him. It projected on the walk so far that when Mike slinked past he was within easy reach.

Dan dropped him by a blow under the ear from behind, without a scuffle or a lost motion.

Now what to do with him? His hand touched the hard lump of the knife at his hip. He took it out and felt the edge, his face lighting grimly. He never lost his saving salt of humor in all the bitter years to follow. Always, as now, it flashed out at the moment when death's shadow brooded blackest over him, or, more commonly, over his enemy. Men grinned even when they grew pale at the mention of his name, at the quaint memories it aroused.

Knife in hand he flashed a look along the deserted street, then bent over the Slugger and pulled off his flat cap. A few deft strokes of the razor edge and half the yeggman's scalp shone as bald as a billiard-ball, while the other side of his bullet-head still wore its thick black crop. Dan surveyed the white expanse of skin critically, then drew four upright lines with the point of the knife, just deep enough to draw blood. As the Slugger stirred and groaned, Wheeler quickly took away a short revolver from his hip pocket and stood back to let him get up.

The Slugger rolled to his knees, then stood up groggily and put his hands to his half-shaven head. He rubbed the bald side, looked at his reddened hand, and did it over again, slowly and stupidly.

"My Gawd!" he croaked huskily. "My Gawd! Say—that ain't no way to treat a man!"

And the corners of his mouth drew down plaintively. He covered the lonesome side of his head with one big protecting paw and wriggled his shoulders with a childish grimace. "My Gawd! Scalped! And they's hair down my back!"

"Sure! I put it there. Here—wait!" Wheeler handled the Slugger's gun threateningly, by the barrel. "Go through your clothes and dig up a match and a piece of paper, if you got one, or an envelope. Lively now, or I hand you another and barber you up some more."

After a scrambling search the Slugger found a match and a soiled and crumpled envelope. He handed them over at long reach. Then he pleaded:

"Say—I got 'nuff! My Gawd! I mus' be a sight! Can I go now?"

"No. Stand still or I'll split you wide open. Take your hand off your nut and don't wink while I paint your portrait. Steady now!"

Wetting the match in the blood that trickled down the Slugger's frightened face,

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Wheeler slowly printed on the envelope-back:

MICK THE BUZZER GOT HIS
MIKE GOT A HAIR-CUT
NEXT?
N. B. WE STILL GOT THE KNIFE

"Give this to your boss, quick as you can get to him. You hear? And there were *four* of us jumped on you—get that?"

"What th'— I ain't seen no— Sure, I gotcha! Sure, they's four of yuh. I got 'nuff!" And the Slugger backed away from the glare of the green eyes that caused a sinking at the pit of his stomach.

"Don't forget it! Four of us jumped you from behind—four. Now beat it. Here's your hat."

Slugger caught the cap kicked toward him, pulled it over his half-bare poll and scuttled off, rubbing the blood from his cheek and wiping his hand on his pants.

It would be good strategy to allow the Slugger time to report to his employer before venturing again in the Gramercy Park neighborhood.

Wheeler turned over in his hand the gun taken from the ex-pugilist, and saw that it was almost new. He looked at his watch and found he was hungry. So he made for a Broadway loan office, parted with the arm, and used the proceeds for refreshments. As he came out of Stanley's he brushed two young men, food-filled and amusement-bent, also bored and sober. Pulling on his gloves, one of them swallowed a yawn.

"Well, shall we try a show? They're all punk."

"I don't know. La Buerthe is dancing at the Gotham—comes on at nine-thirty. In the meantime I'll play you pool for the seats—well?"

"You're on, I fahncy. My word, this is a dull town!" And they were gone.

"And that's no lie!" Wheeler muttered to himself as he set off in the opposite direction. "I'd get out of it in a minute, only for Potter. And I'll be out of it in the morning, at that, if he doesn't get me first. He sure will try all he knows. It's my hunch this will be my busy evening; everything points that way so far. Here's where I need my rabbit's-foot."

He made his third and last start for the house of the famous dancer. For all his blasé word-pose, and in spite of all that depended on his escape from Potter's scheming, he was alive and a-tingle with young hope and things a-doing. The odds against him now were only two or three to one, and if Potter believed the message sent by the Slugger, he might be ready to propose a truce or a parley.

If it were to be a truce, of course it would be a treacherous one. But he would accept it. If Dan Wheeler was not good enough to win in a contest of wits, why, he would—no! He would not lose. It was out of the question.

If he lost, it would mean that the girl—in his thoughts she rode serene and lovely far above earth and its denizens—the girl would be defiled and dragged in the mire. He knew too well what it would mean if Potter got her away from her few friends. He, Wheeler, would unhesitatingly shoot her first. It was his candid opinion that he would—not—lose!

So he walked past the house, doubled around a corner and waited. Nothing doing. He was not followed. The two men still on the job had been called off or called in. More likely they were inside the house, or posted elsewhere as a trap.

Again he passed the house. The shades were drawn and no light showed except in the vestibule entrance and on the third floor above. The house was quietly threatening; too quiet.

Nine-tenths of New Yorkers above actual squalor, live in layers or slices—spread their domestic activities flat or upright. Not long ago the family in a house was commonly a cut above the family in a flat. La Buerthe belonged to this period, so she had a house because she could afford it. It was not quite on the Park's exclusive frontage, but a few doors away on an abutting street, very clean and sedately quiet at all times. As Wheeler stood looking at it, however. something in its looks or surroundings roused him to an alert tension.

As he stood thus, fairly bristling with suspicion, a carriage came rolling along the dark street from beyond him, going in the direction of the park. As it drew near him it rolled closer to the curb and he saw that the carriage door on his side was partly open. He stepped back, one step, two——

There was a flash before his eyes—a roar—a sulfurous smell in his nostrils as he dropped into a bottomless blackness, shot with starry streaks.

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With his attention focused on the approaching carriage, whose rattle covered the sound of stealthy steps behind him, he had no warning of the approach of a man with a slender tight-packed bag of sand which he held by one end like a club. A noiseless blow at the back of the neck—Wheeler was caught up and flung into the open door of the moving carriage.

The sandbagger darted back into a dark doorway, the carriage disappeared in the direction of East River. Again the street was silent and empty.

IV

JUDGE COWAN sat at his desk in his library. He was alone in the house, for Margery Slater and young Van Twiller were part of a theater-party, and would not return until after a supper.

On the mahogany desk before him was a decanter and siphon, also a new book, apparently, wrapped and tied as if fresh from the shop, except that the string was sealed where it was crossed and tied. The Judge mixed himself a stiff drink, drank it all and set down the glass with a twisted smile.

From a drawer at his side he took a bright revolver and laid it beside the neat package. He looked from the one to the other, and mixed a second drink.

Between the leaves of that book, he knew, there were bank-notes of large figures, his share of a whole year's graft-money. A trusted messenger had brought him the package not fifteen minutes before, and when the bell rang the Judge had been holding the revolver to his temple. He had waited until after the clocks had chimed twelve before taking the gun from its drawer, and then he had hesitated. If he had not— Then again the twisted smile.

The money in that package, corruption-money as it was, might not only save his reputation, but would almost surely save Margery Slater some part of her legacy which he had stolen to save himself from Potter's closing clutches. He had taken the money left her by her father, left in his hands to invest. But now he could replace enough of it so that he would not be in danger of a prison-sentence.

Even then, however, Potter could ruin him financially, and would surely do it unless he could bring about a marriage between Potter and the girl. He frowned and sighed as he got up to put the precious package in the safe behind him.

He did not close the safe-door at once, but took out a thinner, smaller packet and read the inscription—

For Dan Wheeler on Demand.

It was written in Slater's large clear hand.

The Judge was bending to replace it when a tense, resonant voice startled him—

"I'll take it now, Judge!"

And as the older man whirled about, it added—

"And the other, while you are about it!"

"Dan Wheeler!" gasped the Judge. "Where did you come from?"

Standing by the Judge's desk, Dan held in his left hand the Judge's revolver. The other hand was in a shapeless mass of bandages, held by a neck-sling. The young man's clear bold features stood out like clean-chiseled marble, and the force of his presence filled the room while his level-lidded eyes held the older man's sternly.

"Where? From the Pen, where you helped put me. And I came by your back stairs. There's another thief waiting for me on the side-street. So hand out both the packages, your Honor!"

"So the penitentiary has made you a crook, or crazy, or both. Do you want to go back to prison tomorrow?" The Judge frowned judicially.

"No, that's why I want both packages —stand back!"

Wheeler deliberately laid the gun on the desk, never taking his gaze from the Judge, and walked to the safe. He took one packet from the Judge's unresisting hand, the other from the safe, while the older man seemed paralyzed. Then, moving with a catlike smooth grace, he returned to the far side of the desk, laid on it the packages and waved the Judge to his chair.

"Your Honor will please be seated and favor me with your undivided attention," he purred gently.

Like a man in a trance the Judge obeyed, staring vacantly up into the eyes that held him. The compelling voice went on:

"Once your Honor predicted that I should be sorry if I offended Mr. Potter. You were right. Potter got me, as he got you and some other crooks. But, your Honor, I shall never wear stripes again. Do you believe that?"

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"I don't know," the Judge heard his own husky voice answer; "nor care."

"Yes—you care," Wheeler went on evenly, and his green eyes narrowed. "You care a lot, your Honor. Listen! I shall never go back to that branch of hell on earth. I may go to the electric chair, but never to the penitentiary, because I have had enough. Your Honor—*I will kill you, or any man who tries to put me there!* I should advise your Honor to believe that. Get it into your thick head, —— you! *Got it?*"

"Yes!" The Judge recoiled from the explosion and the sudden flare in the green eyes.

"Yes. You believe it—of course you do. So do I. Pardon my momentary impatience. Now then, to return to Potter. He got me again this evening—got me where I had to take his advice. You advised me to take his advice once. You would advise me to take his advice now, as you do. Wouldn't you? Answer 'yes' or 'no,' your Honor!"

"Yes."

"Judge, his advice was to take this money away from you. I could do that or go back to the Pen tomorrow. He proved he could put me there, and he pointed out that you could not stop me, because to prove your property would be to prove yourself a criminal. So I am taking his advice, and yours, when I take these packages and wish you good evening—thanking you for your kind attention."

"Wait!" The Judge started upright as Wheeler was picking up the packets. "That money—dirty money, I admit—is all that stands between Potter and the girl—all that stands between Margery Slater and poverty. Do you want to ruin her?"

"Judge, you surprise and grieve me." Wheeler drew himself up with dignity. "By your own story you have stolen her money. Would you have me, an ex-convict and a crook, give up the money I have stolen? Have you forgotten what I told you, your Honor? I told you I'd never wear stripes again, and advised you to believe it. You'll have to bid higher than that, your Honor. It's not good enough."

Coldly the young man watched the Judge as he dropped his despairing gaze to the desk. The old man's eyes wandered to the revolver, lying where Wheeler had dropped it.

Putting down the packages, Dan took up the gun, threw out the shells and put the empty weapon in his pocket. He picked up again only the smaller package, and as he slipped it in with the gun, he said:

"You are not to be trusted with a gun, Judge. You wouldn't use it on the right one. Better shoot the girl than let Potter get her—you know that! Suppose I take her, Judge," he leaned over to whisper harshly.

"Stop right there, you young demon!" The Judge raised a bloodshot angry gaze. "I have had to take your insults, but before I'll see that girl ruined by a hell-hound like you, I'll strangle you with my own hands!"

Rising on trembling legs, teeth bared and lean hands clutching, he lurched forward.

"I'll strangle you—I swear it! Get out of my sight, you devil!"

"Well, look who's here!" With head back-flung Dan held him at arm's-length and mocked: "Judge Cowan, the crook, in his justly celebrated act, entitled: 'His Life For Her, or the Defender of Innocence.' But you'll sell her to Potter to save your withered hide!"

"You lie, you demon, you lie!" gasped the old man. "I will go to the chair first! Neither Potter nor you, if I have to commit murder in my own——"

"Now you make a noise like a man, Judge. Sit down!" Wheeler pushed the old man into his chair as if he were a man of straw. "Listen, and hear something to your advantage. See this envelope? Open and look in it."

He tossed on the table before the Judge a sealed, blank envelope.

For a time the old man stared stupidly into the cold face above him, gasping and wheezing, while the rage within him died and gave place to stunned inactivity and senile weakness. Wheeler had to rouse him.

"Open the envelope and look inside!"

With hands that shook and fumbled the Judge tore open the envelope and drew out two checks. Twice he tried to place his glasses on his nose before he could read the checks, and recognize his own signature.

"My checks—to Potter? How did you get these?"

Back on familiar ground now, he was becoming himself, his mind again active.

"Potter's mistress gave them to me. Potter thinks he still has them. Are those checks all the hold Potter has on you?"

"Financially—yes. But he can make me write duplicates. He has——"

"If Potter—put it this way— Suppose

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Potter never shows up again—disappears, or commits suicide. You and the girl come out whole—is that right?"

In the level, long-lidded green eyes there was a cold, inhuman glitter that made the Judge slowly stiffen his back and lean forward, as if drawn to them by a fascination of horror.

"You—would you," he whispered hesitantly, "would you—murder the man?"

"That's not in your jurisdiction," Wheeler answered drily. "I am putting a hypothetical case. Suppose he were to be found, gun in hand, and a hole in him, tomorrow morning. You wouldn't wear black or shed bitter tears, Judge—what? Would the coroner be fussy? I don't think! He hasn't a friend in New York—nobody who stands to lose by his death."

"Dan Wheeler, I knew your father." There was a true dignity in the Judge's manner as he raised his hand in protest. "I can not see his son start on a career of——"

"That will be all!" Wheeler cut him off crisply. "It sounds thin, coming from you. Forget it. You are out of it—listen!"

Through a partly open window came the sound of a shrill distant whistle.

"That's Potter, Judge. It means time's almost up. If I don't show up in five minutes he blows again, and a third whistle will be the signal for a blue-coat out in front of this house. He will come in to run me in for burglary."

"Then go out as you came in—the back door through the basement. And I solemnly warn you, it is my duty——"

The Judge was holding forth heavily.

"I know all that line of talk. Can it!" Wheeler broke in.

Then, as the Judge held out to him both his own packet and the larger one, Dan took only the smaller bearing his name.

"No use taking all that money. Keep it for—for the girl," he finished in a lower tone, with a slow mounting flush.

"But Potter will arrest you. He has been sworn in as a special officer," the Judge was objecting when Wheeler, impatiently, stopped him.

"He'll run me in anyway, if he can. That's his game. And he'd use the money for evidence. He's licking his lips now, thinking how soft I am, doing his dirty work for him, and how he'll enjoy taking me to the station himself—a poor cripple like me. Good night!"

"But you are not armed, and your hand is injured," the Judge protested.

"I don't have to be armed to be arrested." Wheeler showed the edge of his white, even teeth in his rarely handsome smile. "Judge, that was a bad break. Good n——"

THERE was the sound of the key in the street door. It opened, and a clear voice in the hall called:

"Uncle Ned! Where are you?"

"Go! Don't let her see you!" The old man sprang up to urge Dan from the room.

"She's infatuated with you. I could do nothing with her!"

"——!" Wheeler growled, breaking away from the Judge's nervous clutch.

His quicker wits recognized that escape was impossible, and he was already in action, in a manner most strange.

Even as the Judge spoke, Wheeler had darted to the desk, taken a swallow of raw brandy from the decanter, spilled some on his vest, run his hand through his hair, rumpling it on end, and now he reeled against the desk to face the door with a silly smile.

In the door stood the girl, a lovely vision in evening dress, with a smile of relief slowly curving her mobile lips as she put a hand to her breast.

"Oh Uncle—we were frightened. The messenger said you were—Oh! Mr.—Mr. Wheeler!"

She spoke his name in a whisper, wide-eyed, and drew a step nearer to the reeling man who clung to the desk and leered at her through evil eyes. Over the translucent velvet of her neck and face a slow flush spread, faded, and she took another slow step nearer.

"You are hurt—ill? Let me—can't we do something for you?" She saw nothing but the strange eyes with the gleam that hurt, and her lips trembled as she caught her breath. "What—What is it? Why do you look at me like that?"

"I'm aw right—you're aw right," Wheeler thickly growled. "Look at you b'cause you're easy to look at, girlie! I c'n look 't you without takin' ether, any day." He smiled a sickly smile.

Although he reeked of brandy and his face was a grimace, she did not shrink from him. VanTwiller stepped forward, fists clenched, but the girl never looked away from Wheeler's face.

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"Tell me—won't somebody tell me what is the matter? Uncle—Peter?"

"Nothing alarming, Margery," the Judge told her, while he shook his head at VanTwiller. "Mr. Wheeler has hurt his hand—that's all. He was about to leave as you came in. Here is your other package, Mr. Wheeler. Shall I put it in your pocket for you?"

He stepped to Wheeler's side to whisper:

"You're a man! Take it, and go, for God's sake!"

But her young ears caught the whisper in part, and the girl was the more alarmed. Her eyes filled. She caught her lip in her teeth, and Dan gasped at the sheer near loveliness of her as he forced his part.

"Go when I get ready—good 'n' ready. Goin' West, girl. Wan' to come?"

And as she still looked deep into his eyes without disgust, he managed a satyr's leer:

"Come with Dan—I c'n be good to yuh—good to yuh, girl!"

He breathed an alcoholic blast toward her as he lurched forward and put out a hand that trembled. Peter stepped up to him.

"You'd better go now. You're—you're drunk!"

"Drunk y'rself! Stan' back!" Dan transferred a baleful glare to VanTwiller.

"Don't, Peter! He's not himself!" The girl stepped between, let Dan's hand rest on her bare shoulder without a tremor as she looked up at him. "I am not afraid. Mr. Wheeler—do you mean— I am not afraid to go—anywhere!"

In the hush that came over the room, Dan drew back the hand that had touched her, reeled back with eyes closed, and put the hand over his lips. Over his face came a light like that of one who dreams of Paradise, just for one instant, then . . .

Through the half-open window came again the shrill distant whistle!

"My girl, you don't know what you're saying!" The Judge broke silence with eager haste. "The man is a criminal—just out of prison. He will tell you so himself; and he came here to rob my safe. If he will not go now, quietly, I shall be obliged to ask Peter to call an officer to take him to jail."

"Mr. Wheeler! *Dan!*" At the girl's anguished cry Wheeler opened his eyes to see her so close he could breathe the fragrance of her, still with utter trust in her sweet face. "Tell them it is all a horrible mistake. I know it is. Nothing can make any difference—but tell them! And tell me—something else!"

At the last sweet whisper she flushed faintly. In her deep eyes was soft trust and longing. All the sad yielding tremor of her lips told him of a woman pure and perfect, all his for the taking. And all the man in him rose in glory.

But at the same instant—the supreme moment of his life—came the memory of his sufferings, the bitterness and the scars they had left. With that also the thought of what was waiting for him outside stung him to action, steeled him to strike cruelly.

"Tha's the stuff! Come along!" he choked, and thrust his face close to hers. "Come—but don't get notions of wedding-bells. No marryin' in mine! We c'n make a barrel of money—but you——"

At the monstrous words, hissed through his thin lips drawn as in pain, even the Judge started from his chair. VanTwiller sprang at Wheeler with a driving blow straight from the shoulder. With a cat-like glide Dan sidestepped, caught Peter's wrist and with a turn of his body hurled him crashing headlong into a bookcase behind him.

Peter dropped to the floor, stunned and bleeding, while Dan bent over him and went through his pockets deftly. In a second he had found and pocketed the Pennsylvania ticket that Peter had bought for him. Then he turned for one look at the girl.

At the words she only half understood, she had drawn back with a stifled cry like one stabbed from behind, dropped her face in her hands, and now knelt at the desk, face hidden in her arms. The Judge's lean hand rested on her head. Again the room was hushed. Again the distant whistle sounded —the third time.

Wheeler stole swiftly to the door with the smooth glide of a leopard, turned just in time to meet the tearful glance of the girl as she raised her head. She surprised him with his face off-guard, showing all the man's power and yearning protection, and over her own came a wonder-change.

With a long gasping breath of delight she stretched out both arms to him.

He stood motionless for one instant, turned away with one swift backward look, and disappeared without a sound.

The Judge's library seemed strangely

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empty. The old Judge watched the girl as she stood dazed for a little time, passed her hand over her eyes and turned to where Peter was slowly picking himself up, with one hand feeling his bruised head. Then with a little low cry of pity she went to him, and the Judge stole from the room to answer the bell at the door.

V

WHEELER came out from the basement of a vacant house on a side street and looked along the empty sidewalk, glistening under a cold rain. He was near a corner, where he knew Potter was waiting under the shelter of the landing at the foot of the elevated stairs. The whole street was deserted except for one hurrying figure, a woman's figure, coming toward him.

As she came near the woman took a long look, but his face was in shadow.

She drew nearer, and her voice was hoarse as she accosted him:

"Lonesome, dearie?"

He recognized the burned eyes and the face, still pretty through the outraged shame and enamel, of the woman he had given a dollar a few hours ago. She came close and tried to take his arm.

"I'm as dry as a gravel-roof, and you look like a stiff one would do you good. Let's go over to Belle's. I'll cheer you up. Come with sister!" As she pulled at his arm she uncovered the bandaged hand. "Pardon me, I didn't see your hand."

He had turned so the light struck his face, and she added: "Nor your face. You're the one—say, are the bulls on your trail?"

She stifled a hoarse cough, and Wheeler put his hand in his pocket with a dry half-smile as he said:

"Suppose I make it a V this time. Will you get something dry on your feet—take something for that cough and——"

"Put up your money!" She pushed his hand away as he held out a bill. "You think, because I'm on the street——"

"Life's short! Take it and go to bed. You're sick enough, now."

"Say, what are you anyhow?" She looked in his face wonderingly as he forced the money into her hand. "A sky-pilot—or a Settlement freak?"

"Not any, sister. Just a plain crook. Good night!"

"Wait! You must be the man with 'his hand in a sling.' There's a flatfoot around the corner back there, waiting to run you in. I heard a plain-clothes man give him his orders. Can't you duck? Listen! I can get you into a place a few doors down, and get you a skirt and cape. You can get across to——"

"Thanks, sister, but I've got a date with a man on the other corner. Wish me luck."

"Gawd knows I do! I'd pray for you, if there was any such animile. Good night and good luck, sport!"

She watched him disappear in the shadow of the elevated before she started for her lodgings muttering hoarsely:

"Can you beat it? A crook— I don't think! And the only white man in New York."

When Potter stepped out of the dark shelter of the "L" landing, to meet Wheeler, there was not a human in sight. He stepped quickly to Dan's side and took a firm grip on his sound arm.

"You took your time about it. Got the stuff?" he asked threateningly.

"Got all I wanted—sure!" Wheeler assumed a mildly, cheerful drunk, and pulled from his pocket the Judge's revolver. "Got a gun—an' a jag of brandy!"

"You fool!" Potter warily seized the gun as it emerged from the pocket nearest him, then hurriedly felt Wheeler over. "What's this?"

He pocketed the revolver and pulled out Dan's package. After a look at it in the light, he turned on Wheeler with a snarl.

"So you got soshed and fumbled the only chance you had! Lost your nerve—you soft slob! And the time and money I've wasted to land a poor drunken simp like you. Come along—you for the Station House!"

"All right!" Wheeler staggered and grinned. "But take 'L'—no walking in mine!"

And he pulled Potter up a step of the "L" stairs. Potter thought for a moment, concluded that a child could handle Wheeler, drunk and with one hand helpless, and followed up the stairs, holding tight to Dan's sound arm.

As they reached the first half-way landing, Potter heard the distant rumble of a train. They were infrequent at this morning hour and he hurried his reeling prisoner.

"Move up, now! There's the train!"

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And he added some words of appreciation.

"Hol' on—I'm dizzy—faint."

Dan reeled back, toppled dangerously at the head of the stairs. Potter had to let go the arm to catch him roughly around the body.

"Hold up! No, you don't! he ground between his teeth. "—— you! Stiffen up! You—*unh!*"

He finished with a grunt. Wheeler's freed arm, whipping under his own, had caught his waist in a crushing grip, while Wheeler's body was pressed close to his own, over the gun that he carried in his trousers' waist-band. Potter gave one hoarse cry of terror as he saw Wheeler's hand—the injured one—slip easily from its bandages, felt it slide under his vest, seize the gun and turn its muzzle close up under his ribs.

Before the fear-palsied man could make a single movement he heard Wheeler's grim whisper:

"Now Potter—oh-h *Potter! There!*"

He got one terrified look into the flashing green eyes that glared up into his in venomous triumph, then the bullet tore its way up under the ribs and through the heart—he was torn apart—and pain and black darkness.

Muffled beneath coat and vest, between the close-pressed bodies, the report could not have been heard on the street below. There was only a dull thumping blow, drowned by the rumble of the approaching train.

Potter's body heaved backward in a horrible arching spasm, then doubled forward to collapse on the landing. Wheeler bent over the jerking heap of flesh and clothing, forcing the still warm fingers to close on the revolver-butt under the dead man's vest, there to stiffen and prove suicide. Then he stood up, stuffing a wad of bandages into his pocket with a hand that had a strip of plaster across its back. The heap had shrunk, was still. Above, the train thundered to a stop.

He bounded up the stairs with easy tiger-leaps. He passed his nickel through the window, dropped his ticket in the box, and slid between the closing gates just as the train pulled out.

THE next afternoon, as the Chicago Limited, West-bound, was rolling through the lakeside suburbs, two men in the Pullman smoking-room were opening the fresh evening papers. The fat shoe-buyer from St. Paul remarked:

"Another fool suicide—right on the 'L' stairs. They sure pick some freak ways to bump themselves off!" He read, under the heading:

PROMINENT POLITICIAN SUICIDES

Mysterious End of a Mysterious Man.

And when he had finished the details with relish, he asked:

"Now what was the idea—sticking the gun under his vest, instead of blowing his brains out?"

The young man opposite yawned:

"Dodging the bones, perhaps."

And he stared out into the falling snow with sleepy, narrowed eyes.

"Must have felt good!" the fat man commented sarcastically.

"You're dead right, it did!"

At the force of the reply the shoe-buyer looked over his paper in surprise. The dangerous young face was still turned to the window, and in the sleepy, cat-like eyes was a ruthless far-looking stare that made the fat man uncomfortable.

"THERE was money in the package Slater left?" I suggested to the famous gambler, when the shivers had stopped running up my back.

He had just finished telling me how he came to "get" his first man, years ago, and I looked away from his face. When I looked back at it, it was not so unpleasant.

"Money, and a photograph," he assented briefly. "I always had money. It is easy to get, if you don't care how you get it."

After a reminiscent silence, I was encouraged to ask—

"What happened after you were sandbagged that evening?"

"I woke up in Potter's headquarters—in Cécile Buerthe's house. He held the cards, and I had to be good. That hand was what dumped his apple-cart."

He showed me a scar on the back of his handsome right hand, the hand that always had for me the fascination of terror, for the things it had done.

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"He thought he had cut the tendons," he explained. "And I strung him along—I and Cécile."

"Was she there?" I asked eagerly.

"After Potter left me, locked in. She was there more than an hour."

And a blind man could see there was no use asking what that hour meant to him.

"What I don't see," I blundered on desperately, "is how she had the nerve to take those checks. What would have happened when Potter found it out—the next day?"

Wheeler turned on me a slow, level-lidded glance, calmly judicial.

"He was planning to get rid of her—she knew too much. So she had to take a chance and play the cards she had. She was betting there wouldn't be any Potter 'the next day,' and she won."

"Oh!" I said and held my breath, sitting on the edge of my chair.

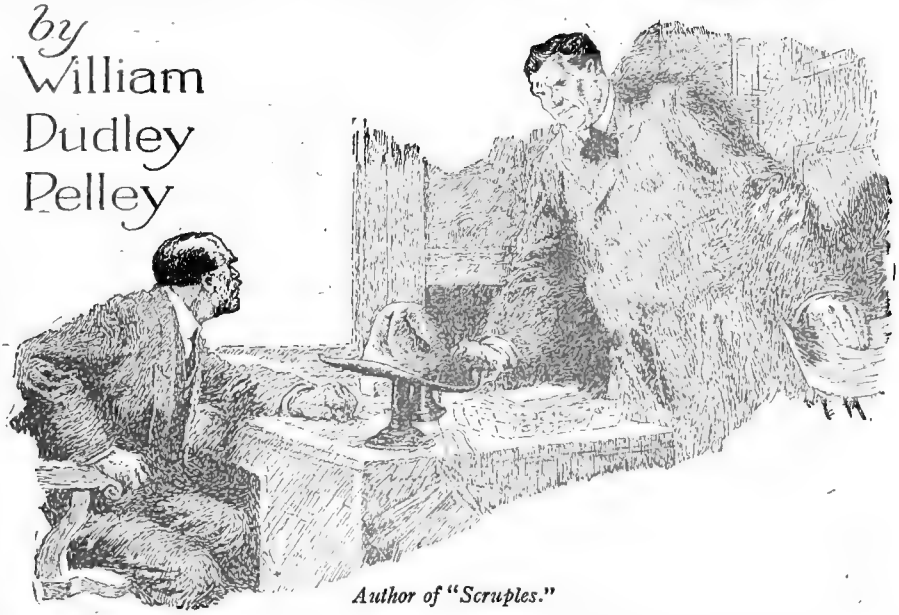
But he did not volunteer any more explanations, and I didn't feel like pushing any farther. One wouldn't, you know, with a man like him.

Dan Wheeler may have had a lot of the Old Adam in him. I'd think better of our common ancestor if he had had enough of Dan Wheeler in him not to whine——

"The woman tempted me."

HOOTY COMES EAST

by William Dudley Pelley



Author of "Scruples."

"IF YOU was me—" lamented a string-bean individual, leaning disconsolately across a pasture-fence in the sunset—"if you was me, and this was the West, what would you do?"

He put the question to a remarkable young giant who gazed with him over the Deerlick Valley of lower Muskegon which a sinking sun was slowly submerging in a sea of bronze.

Copper-hued as the fluted afterglow was this seven-foot stranger, with a huge sombrero aslant his savage Indian profile and a Prince Albert coat strained around his immense proportions, who reached a powerful hand for the newspaper which the farmer passed him with spiritless face. The evening stage which had brought up the paper from Newbury was clicking away in the sand.

"So they got you?" commented the Titanic young man. "They walk through the valley and say 'Gimme them farms!' And when you squeal like a hog in a sausage machine, they spray you with legislative

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Paris green or flip you off your property like potato-bugs. Some country this East!"

Rapidly the blue-steel but humorous eye of the man, who needed no card-index to place him as a denizen of the Montana cow areas, scanned the article which blared from the paper in scare-heads:

DEERLICK FARMERS LOSE!

Legislature Upholds International Power Company in Right to Relocate Highways

SEVENTEEN FARMS CUT OFF FROM TOWN AND RAILROAD

After an all-day hearing before the appointed judicial committee, a decision was handed down last evening disregarding the petition of homesteaders in the Deerlick Valley that the International Electrical Development Company be permanently restrained from locating their Number Five dam and reservoir between Hogback and Whitney Mountains.

Successful condemnation proceedings in the last court of chancery resulted in permission for the International people to appropriate seventeen farms in the basin of the Deerlick for flooding purposes, and the relocation of four highways connecting Newbury with Hartshorn which cross the valley that the power company wish to sink under water.

The protest which resulted in yesterday's hearing came from owners of property above the flooded area and along the four highways to be relocated. Newbury being the shipping and marketing center, these last farmers own properties that under present conditions are but two miles from railroads and markets. The new highway which the legislature obliges the power company to construct will encircle the rear of the proposed reservoir with a detour of fourteen miles. Thus, through no fault of their own, these property-owners must witness their properties transferred sixteen miles from a railroad center.

Naturally the power company can not purchase all the farms in the surrounding country above their flooded area. Yet for many of these homesteaders the depreciation means bankruptcy.

At the request of a committee of these property-owners, Judge Waterford granted them a temporary injunction restraining construction until their pleas could be heard. The committee, after hearing all the evidence, reported that the electrical development along the Deerlick was of too great consequence for the prosperity of the state to be handicapped by the unfortunate predicament of a few minor individuals.

The International Electrical Development Company have received all their machinery, and work on throwing the concrete wall, seventy feet high and twenty feet thick, on the half-mile from mountain to mountain, will begin Monday morning.

"Waal, several things," continued the cowman. "I could wait until the dam's done and buy a twenty-five-cent whisk-broom. With it I could sweep a clean place in my kitchen floor, lie down and plug myself full with a gun loaded with daylight. Or I could take the same twenty-five cents, pay it down on a two-dollar suit-case and travel so far on the interest of my debts, and nothing could find me but a dog I'd been trying to lose for a year.

"Either way would heave me out of my troubles. But for you it would be sort o' demoralizin', civilized, and showin' that your bile of human slaughter had risen to the top like cream. Speaks too much of men that read the newspaper after supper, sigh when the women-folks wants ten cents for the movies and sleeps till noon Sundays on the excuse they don't believe in religion. If it was me I'd solve this here legal ruckus like we settle things in Montana."

"How?"

"Plow into it with a gun that looks like the entrance to a tunnel. Bang your way through with cartridges and a righteous purpose——"

"I can't," replied the labor-contorted man. "I got no money."

"Money ——! It ain't money you need, it's stommick! Suppose I'd see myself cut off from town and railroad without a bally copper sou?"

"That's what I'm a-askin' you. What'd you do?"

"Blow their little old dam into a scenic effect for motion pictures."

"And get arrested. And go to prison."

"Not on a Chinese photograph!"

The puncher handed back the paper, thrust one hand into the pocket on his stomach and with the other rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Hemingway," said he finally in slow, deliberate drawl, "I always did have a measly little hookworm in my vitals suggestin' I'd missed my callin' straightenin' out the destinies o' critter beef. You know I spent two years in Pawnee—only I never tell it except in correspondence where the glue on the envelope ain't shirkin' responsibility. Waal, they always said in college my niche in fame's alley was business. That in thinkin' up ways to separate corporations from their bank-roll I had Old Pierpont and Hoot-Mon Andy hangin' with blistered palms to my stake-rope. Seems to me this would be a good chance to prove it."

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"What?"

"That I could make this power company either buy these farms—or reimburse you for their depreciation. Once on a time some friends of mine took a little flyer in an irrigation company in Montana. A trick by the aggravators abluted them of their bank-roll so clean that—well, their souls looked like a bald man's head when his wig gets caught on a rafter. I think I could work it on this situation. How much is your old farm worth?"

"Sixteen mile from nowhere she wouldn't bring a thousand. There's hundreds of abandoned farms in this state that ain't got nothin' the matter except they're sixteen mile from nowhere." And the man with his elbows on the fence rested his forehead on his wrists for an instant and sighed.

The cowman spat disgustedly.

"Sufferin' cats! Quit them hemorrhages o' sorrow! Fight 'em, you poor jelly-bean! Sail into their directors with a table-leg! Distribute 'em permiscuous and disorderly round the landscape, duly amenable to the idea that a real man's job in life is helpin' the other fellow. Your forefathers grabbed axes or scythe-blades and discouraged the Hun at the gate with intentions you now call patriotism. Here comes a bunch o' home grabbers with injunctions instead o' bayonets and you give in like a yellow dog who can't rid himself o' the can on his tail and has about made up his mind to use it as a growler and rush it."

Again he spat in the dust.

"I know talk's cheap," he went on, "even if I did have to contribute once to the funeral expenses of a woman who died o' dislocated jaw. But you transfer title in this here farm to me and we'll see what a little Montana nerve'll do—vintage of '49. Anyhow, you can't be any worse off than you are now!"

The man Hemingway became persuaded, for when the eight-o'clock narrow-gage train wormed out of the valley to connect with the flyer at Dalton for New York, Hooty Malone sat in the smoking-car with his head dangling over the back of the seat. There he talked lovingly into his hat—which science explains as an obstruction of adenoids in the larynx, and which announces to burglars, mischievous children and gentlemen coming home from the lodge at 3 A. M. that the victims of the peculiarity are securely clasped in the hugs of Morpheus.

AT NINE o'clock, therefore, of the following morning the president of the International Electrical Development Company raised his paving-block jaw with a scowl. The door of his private office opened and an individual stood within the room who made it resemble an attempt to get seven or eight miles of Montana prairie into a forty-inch trunk.

"Who let you in?" roared the power man.

"A pair of pound-hinges and a Vernon Castle fop that couldn't help himself. Are you Bronson?"

"Get out!" roared the thunderous president.

"Take it back!" commanded Hooty, "or I'll kick you in the stomach. You've mauled employees, courts and legislatures till you think you're the divine side-partner of the German Emperor. Now you're looking on the sublime mug of a party you can't maul. Send the feller out. I want to talk in private."

"Who are you to give orders here?"

"Hooty Malone, cow-puncher-in-ordinary, late from Montana—still later from Muskegon."

"What's your business?"

"I'm a forty-four caliber cog in the packer's pastime of dividend-passin', of whose properties millionaire socialists write novels. Temporarily I'm the entire Red Cross delegation for the bruised and battered farmers of the Deerlick Valley. I've bought a few farms where you're puttin' in them dams and I've journeyed to this wild and wicked city to hammer some Christianity into you."

"How?"

"By draw-poker methods. And when you play poker you don't draw public diagrams of the sanguinity of the cards. Bronson, I'm about as much afraid of you as a small boy of the only feller in the schoolyard he can lick. I ain't of this 'ere opera-box, powder-puff and money-worshipin' East. I'm wild and woolly and full of fleas. I come from a section of planet where a man stands for what he is, not for his grandfathers or his lawyers. And I've been called in to help a bewildered bunch of soil-grubbing agriculturists who've accepted the idea that because you've got a few million dollars, you can use the country for a private door-mat. And you've been doin' it so long you think the universe is reelin' when some one bobs up from the crowd and hands you a bung on the nose."

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"Jimmie," said Bronson, "go out."

The big sombrero came off and Bronson's desk telephone was eradicated from the usual manifestations of the human eye. A heavy oaken chair was spun into place and into it hefted the puncher's two hundred and forty pounds of titanic physique.

"Now, Bronson, I don't care whether you've got forty million dollars or forty million wives. I'm the incarnate spirit of helpin' the neighbors and I'm on the job with both feet. You represent a power company that's developin' juice in a thousand-foot fall of water in the Deerlick Valley. I represent the folks of that state ownin' certain number of farms in the valley that you've totally overlooked in your gyrations o' construction—property out of reach of the water-line that ain't worth a hoot because of the sudden and impolite location of your dams. They've bunched their grievances in convention assembled and sent me down to squelch the riot. Your company is either goin' to buy them farms or reimburse them farmers for the depreciation of their properties."

"I see myself!" grunted Bronson.

"I'm bettin' you one thousand dollars you do—against a postage-stamp."

Bronson felt in the vest-slit on his stomach and dropped two copper pennies rolling on his desk.

The brawny arm of the Bar Seventy ranch foreman pawed for the pen with which Bronson had left off signing correspondence, with the other hand drawing out a check-book. He wrote an order on a distant cattle bank with stubby, forceful hand. Snapping it off he pounded it on the magnate's spotless blotter.

"I hold legal title to seventeen farms along the Deerlick that form half the watershed for your reservoir feed," continued Malone. "With highways as they are now, their value's thirty-five thousand dollars. After your dinky new highways are in, they'll be worth the sum of eight thousand dollars as abandoned farms—and most of that represented timber that can be hauled out in Winter. The difference is twenty-seven thousand dollars. You've to mail to those farmers your draft for twenty-seven thousand dollars, or one year from today you're going to pay for those farms the sum of eighty-one thousand dollars with interim interest at six per cent."

"Is that a threat?"

"That's a threat. It's a peach of a threat. It's a threat that's goin' to turn you into a delicate pea-green one year from today or I'll make a speech over your remains that'll add new horrors to death. Twenty-seven thousand dollars is a flea-bite in your purse. All you've got to do is to look at the farmers' property depreciated by your dams in exactly the same way as you consider the actual property you got to have to flood. It's only fair play. Why the devil can't you see it?"

"Because it ain't good business to buy something you don't have to own, because of sentiment."

"In other words, the righteousness of the thing be ——!"

"Call it righteousness; call it sentiment; call it anything you please. Only don't call it necessary for me to be wet-nurse for all the bellyaching farmers in Muskegon who want to unload a lot of punk farm property on to a power corporation."

"Then you turn down my offer?"

"I'll see you in —— first."

"My dear friend," said the puncher, rising, "not since me and Sheriff Old King Cole rounded up the Mustang-Gulch rustlers in Sago County have I had the promise of such soul-sousing enjoyment. Nothing in the universe could give me greater pleasure than tyin' your financial tail in knots. I bid you good day."

Fifteen minutes later the puncher, observed of all observers, had spoiled four telegraph blanks in a nearby office and finally despatched a dollar's worth of language to his friend, the sheriff, in Sago City:

Won't be home for a year, King. Shoot the prisoners in the county jail and come East on the next train. I need you to help me trim a forty-million-dollar skunk in the name of patriotism, ennui and the Ten Commandments.

Then he caught his train for the return to the Deerlick Valley.

"Seems to me I better stay East for a while and straighten it out," he wrote to his girl that night. "So many of God's folks has moved West that all that's left is a raft of moral and financial scalawags that would swipe the union suit off an angel if they entertained one unawares."

II

CHIEF ENGINEER SMALLEY of the power company was the manner of creative giants who chew four-cent tobacco and never button their vests.

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On the job, his stomach-belt sagged in front. His mottled work-day sombrero was dented in every conceivable direction but north, east, south, west, and its rim, stiff as an eighteen-inch wafer, was slanted perpetually over his right eye. Brown corduroy trousers were baggy over muddy leggings. A watch that weighed a pound was fastened to him with links of iron.

He was gray at the temples, red in the face, purple when the work went wrong, and violet in his language when the laborers killed anything from time to one another, or boosted the brewing business from the consumers' standpoint, to the detriment of life, liberty and the pursuit of dividends.

On a wine-like morning of the following October, Chief Smalley stepped from the elevator into the International Power Company's offices and announced he was dressed for the occasion by a badly strung four-in-hand tie in addition to the above, a Prince Albert coat and absence of leggings.

He had arrived in New York for the Winter's inaction. The dam was completed. Fourteen hours before, he had climbed a hill and taken a last look westward at the sleeping ocean caged in the three-mile bowl of mountains. Four miles long, half a mile across, fifty feet deep and costing a million, it was worth a Winter's inaction.

Simultaneously with his entrance a secretary burst into the president's office ahead.

"Mr. Bronson!" he cried. "Number Five dam's busted!" and he shoved across the telephone.

Like a man who goes through life with a sign on his forehead, "Plant First Here," and a vociferous person has accepted the invitation, Bronson fumbled for the instrument.

A high-strung and frantic voice of the local attorney came back over the hundreds of intervening miles.

"Your whole bank on the east side of the reservoir's gone out. Hemingway's farm is under thirty feet of water."

"Then the dam's intact?"

"The concrete work is all right. It's the eastern hill. There warn't a deluge because most of the water shifted over into Nolan's lower meadows and there's a hill at the south end holdin' it back."

"Any loss of life?"

"Not that we know yet. You better come right up."

Banging the receiver on the hook, Bronson turned to look into the pasty features of his chief engineer.

"I thought," bellowed Bronson, "you called yourself an expert!"

"The—dam—ain't——"

"Gowry's just long-distanced that our whole east bank has sunk Hemingway's farm under thirty feet of water."

With wooden features Smalley sought a chair.

"Look here," he gasped; "somebody's playing a practical joke. That east bank couldn't go out. There's a hill twenty to thirty feet higher than the flood-line. I've stood on it myself within twenty-four hours."

"I don't care if you sat on it, spat on it or stood on your head on it, either your calculations are way down in Class Z, or somebody's monkeyed with our property."

Over the engineer's apoplectic countenance came a delicate Summer's sunset.

"Yaw!" he exclaimed. "I wonder could it be that redskin?"

"What redskin?"

"You know old Hemingway sold out to a big Westerner who's been nosing round our property all Summer. Yesterday afternoon I went up to have a look at the finished job. I found that feller diggin' in the ground. He said he was blastin' stumps. I said what a funny hole he was digging for a stumpage blast. He said when you're huntin' for buried treasure you dig some mighty queer-shaped excavations."

Bronson jabbed a button.

"Get my emergency grip, Jimmie," he directed. "And call a taxi. Smalley and I will catch the nine-thirty flyer for Muskegon."

AS THE morning sun was washing the Muskegon Mountains with the molten green and gold of another forenoon, a heavy touring-car bowled over the crest of a hill.

Marden Bronson of the balloonish stomach was standing in the tonneau, ready to alight as soon as the speed of the machine permitted.

At the junction of the old sunken road where his new highway started on its long detour to the north, a shabby farmhouse stood back in a yard. The ground dropped away behind down into a half-mile meadow. The meadow had been lower than the bed

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of his reservoir or the course of the Deerlick, but a small hill separated the two in a sturdy natural dike. Now the hill was no longer in evidence. From a few feet behind the lower barnyard to a distant jagged cut in earth and rock was a swirling sheet of angry, foamy water.

Marden was interrupted in speechless inventory of the stupendous damage by a voice he remembered.

"Mornin', Brother Bronson. Sloppy round here—what?"

Strolling leisurely down the weed-woven walk came the figure of the huge panther-cat cowman. The same sombrero was yanked rakishly over the copper profile. The same racked and tortured clothes covered his gigantic anatomy with the suggestion of wrapping Pike's Peak in a bed-blanket. Beneath the hat came a trail of smoke from the tiny brown cigarette of the plains in harsh and dead-set lips.

There was no faltering in the stride that brought Bronson to his antagonist.

"Did you do that?"

"What?"

"Blow out that eastern bank?"

"Sure I blew out that eastern bank. Any objection?"

"You've ruined half a million dollars' worth of property; it'll cost five hundred thousand to make a second concrete wall to take the place of that hill!"

"Wall, it ain't my dam!"

"You'll go to prison for this!" bellowed Bronson. "Blow up our property, will you? We'll show you——"

"I told you, boss, a year ago you was goin' to buy these farms for eighty-one thousand," retorted the puncher. "I reckon you will. Have a cigar?" proffering the box of tiny brown cigarettes.

"—— you and your cigars! You'll go to state's prison for this! And you'll be on your way in an hour."

"That's news," returned the cowman. "On just what dog-eared point o' law do you reckon you'll hang my carcass?"

"You've ruined half a million dollars' worth of private property——"

"My dear feller, somethin' tells me you're excited. And from the scintillations of your trolley I see the thing's slipped off and left your intentions in darkness. I sure did perform tha ruckus. But that there bally hill always was an eyesore. I wanted to see the pretty water fallin' over the dam. So as this side belonged to me I just shipped in a ton o' powder and an electric-button sort o' crazed it in its wits. If there's any law on the books o' this here State that says a man can't blast on his own farm I'll be duly humble and hang the framed statute over my bed."

"You can't go round jolting the universe just because you got a deed to a few square rods!"

"And you can't go round grabbin' the universe just because you got title to a few spare millions. This here farm is one you scoffed at buyin' before that bank went out. But I kind o' reckon, neighbor, you'll pay before you're through."

"So that's your game! You think that now the hill is out I'll have to buy this property at your figure. We'll see. This is conspiracy or I don't know law. This is gigantic blackmail. If forty million dollars can lock you in jail for this—in jail you go."

"Only this is the time when forty million dollars is as necessary as a yaller pup with mange. I can blow this whole farm into kingdom come and you can't peep. I own the land on this side o' the hill—clean down to China and the Orion. I can blast, dig, burrow or eat my side of that hill till all you got left is the sod hangin' in midair, and you nor any other money-warped cuss won't stop me."

"That'll be decided in court!" Bronson banged back. "If you think you can sue me for damages you can go to ——!"

"I don't reckon to sue you for damages. I ain't askin' no lawyer to fight my battles. I can fight 'em with my own nerve and the bunch of natural resource I call my head."

"I'll have you arrested for this, anyhow."

"Yaas? I sort o' reckoned you was a skunk. So I just natcherly had to go and mine the whole hill holding back the meadow o' water to the south. You can buy this property now for eighty-one thousand dollars at six per cent. It'll cost you half a million to build a coffer-dam and make a wall to take place of that unreliable old chunk o' dirt. Savin' four hundred and nineteen thousand-odd dollars. Leave this farm flooded and just raise that south hilltop a trifle and in the course of time you'll have a still greater reservoir than ever before. But try any violence to my person and you have my word that this here forsaken part o' the universe may wabble."

"I dare you to try it!"

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"Don't dare. I got more sportin' blood than a nigger barber. And I might get rash as a new schoolmaster that's sat on a tack."

"I can be dickered with—but try to drive me and I'm as contrary as a pig on ice. Before I'll see you force me I'll drag all our machinery back and put in that coffer-dam if it costs me a million."

"Yaas?" replied the puncher, "and I'm some little frozen-water hog myself. Whose money would you spend? Your penny-pinchin' investors'? And I've arranged with two muckrakin' magazine guys to come on from New York and write up this power development, showin' your investor-fellers how you blow their money to satisfy your little peevishness. I got a hunch it won't take much to make your little old company look like a crowd o' New England railroad directors, contaminatin' the community with branch lines purchased for the price of the Pacific Ocean. What's more, if you had me arrested you've got to try me in the district where the crime was committed. And the verdict you'd get from a panel o' these farmers would burst every blood-vessel in your lemon-juice gizzard."

"I won't pay it!" shrieked Bronson.

"Don't worry," announced Smalley, coming up from the water's edge, "he won't blow out that south hill. It lets the water out and while it costs us half a million, it spoils his hold-up game. He can't use it to threaten us."

"Yes," retorted Bronson to the puncher, "we'll get an injunction out to stop you till we get this farm condemned by the courts. Then if you blow it up you're in contempt o' court."

"I'm in contempt now," retorted the puncher. "I'm so full of contempt it's fairly strainin' my underclothes. Injunct and be ——! I got this here situation buttoned up. And there's more surprises comin' if you get lawless and given to throwin' your sass around the atmosphere permiscuous."

"We'll see. Bill, get your dagoes and temporary cement. Drive on to this property by force. If he stops you, shoot him down! Now that I've seen the damage, I'm goin' back to New York and see Matherson."

He stamped to the waiting touring-car, banged the door and a moment later it slurred out of sight round the curve.

TRAINS limited to fifty miles per hour were too slow to transfer the infuriated power president back to New York for consultation with his counsel. An eighty-horse-power automobile landed him in the regions of lower Broadway at dusk.

He was hoisted to his offices, but before he could reach the telephone to summon Matherson, the secretary had followed him in.

"You better call up Newbury, Mr. Bronson. Mr. Smalley's been trying to get you all the afternoon."

In five minutes Bronson had his connection.

"We can't get a laborer to work within fifteen miles of that property!" shouted Smalley.

"Why not?"

"Because them three farms has enough explosive under 'em to blow up an ex-President of the United States. The cotton he exploded to break the reservoir bank wasn't a pocket-handkerchief to the glycerin still hidin' in the ground."

"How do you know?"

"I got my dagoes and seven ton of bag cement. I had twenty teams out there at one o'clock and Sheriff Pease with me. That copper Hercules was in the front yard. We served the order and he tore it into postage-stamps. I had a bunch of roughnecks along and they piled on. Talk about fight! Say, that guy with a carload of brick could clean up Europe."

"Did you trim him?"

"Somebody clipped him with a billet and he went into the house walkin' in circles. Then when he got inside, the whole blamed face of nature had a sudden cramp in its vitals. Then the front yard riled up so it'll take us a week to bore through."

"Anybody hurt?"

"Half a dozen dagoes got stood on their necks. But they're still amenable to human understandin' and the fear of gunpowder. Three o' the horses ran away, takin' everything with 'em but the wagons. One of the men——"

"How do you know the whole farm's mined?"

"We tried another entrance half a mile farther down. He raised a regular range of mountains along that road. If anybody ever fell into the cave-ins we'd have to recover 'em with an aeroplane."

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"He's going against Judge Waterford's order. He's no right to offer obstruction."

"You could bury him under court orders till he looked like a country editor openin' exchanges, but that won't induce our men to go on that property until there's peace between the Muskegon and Montana."

"—— his soul!"

"—— his nerve! He's got us!"

"What's the matter—lost your nerve?"

"Come up and give a look at these piles of destruction. I ain't got a hankerin' to be near one when it goes off."

"If he kills you, he's up for murder."

"Sure he is—and I'll be up for the gate o' New Jerusalem with grit in my teeth, carryin' most o' myself in a basket. Furthermore, a couple more terrific explosions and there'll be so much ground distracted it'll push the water over the top of that south hill anyhow. Then good night! How'll we ever get it back?"

"You mean to tell me you can't find a way to clap that feller in twisters so he can't do more damage till we get into court?"

"I mean to say I suddenly got a mighty sudden respect for his nerve. Considerin' there ain't a dozen jurors we might get in the county that wouldn't even vote no-license to see us walloped, I don't see any object in paying half a million for the experience of findin' out."

"But I will! By the Great Horn Spoon!"

"Don't forget the question of time. We're under contract to furnish forty thousand horse to the Holland people by Christmas. We can't do it unless we have this reservoir to store through the Winter. The Holland folks'll bring suit for failure to deliver. And if he causes much more destruction—whether we arrest him or not—it'll take another Summer to repair all this damage."

"I won't be blackmailed!" roared Bronson.

The delicate transmitter could not withstand the volume of sound. The roar was converted into a sizzling rasp. But it expressed the magnate's sentiments perfectly.

"I can't help that. Not a solitary dago will go back to work until we make peace with the Westerner and he removes those mines from the property. We got to get his good-will and have him do it. Because them dagoes are wise to what might happen if a pick struck a chunk of it. It's a safer bet paintin' sky-scraper flag-poles. We might arrest him until he looks like the blotter of a precinct police-station, but so long as there's explosive stored in that hill the work is at a standstill."

"Haven't you got a suggestion?"

"Yes, buy him off! Eighty-one thousand with interest is cheap at the price."

"Never!"

"It's a wise man that knows when he's licked."

"A man who never knows when he's licked, never is licked."

"Then we're deadlocked. I won't work on that property so long as there's a chance of getting hung on the point of a star by my shirt-tail."

"You stay on the job until I tell you to quit!"

Bronson banged the receiver on the hook and spoke in three languages, English, dynamic and profane.

He caught up his hat, fretted while his huge red car picked its way across the lower city, and ten minutes later strode up and down his counsel's private office while the hundred-thousand-dollar attorney tapped his glasses on his thumb-nail.

"There is no doubt but that criminal proceedings can be instituted against him," advised Matherson, "but if he holds the key to several tons of explosive placed permiscuously on the property all the courts in the universe can't make him give it up. Courts rely for their power on force of law backed by public opinion and the authority of vested officers. But this man has matched a superior, more primal force against that—the force of dynamite. Moreover, he matched it first. My dear Mr. Bronson, from a purely financial standpoint, it is cheaper to eat humble pie and pay over the eighty-one thousand. Fundamentally your case is weak, in that you have not acquired property adjacent to the dam as well as that actually flooded."

"And take a beating!" cried Bronson. "I never took a beating yet and I won't begin at the age of fifty-three. I'd be the laughing-stock of the construction world."

"For a saving of four hundred and nineteen thousand dollars you can afford it."

"I will not. Somewhere there's an exit to this fight and I'll find it if I now have to hunt it alone. Then I'll throw this duffer through it."

Picking up his automobile cap, Bronson strode from the offices.

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Ten minutes later he had dictated the following telegram:

MALONE:
Come to New York at once. BRONSON.

In two hours came the following answer:

BRONSON:
If you want to see me, come where I am.
MALONE.

"——!" swore Bronson. He jabbed his stenographer's call savagely and after many beginnings signed the following:

MR. MALONE:
While not admitting that we take your antics on Hemingway's farm seriously, we have other things to occupy our attention than hunting unnecessary trouble.
The writer is unable to make the trip to Newbury this week, yet we wish to start operations on repairing our reservoir without further loss of time.
We telegraphed you today because we wished to discuss terms with you, with an end toward an amicable settlement. Will you therefore come to New York without further parley?
Yours respectfully,
BRONSON.

In reply to which, in due course of time, he received the following communication:

MR. BRONSON:
While not admitting that we take your antics to reach a settlement seriously, we have other things to occupy our attention than hunting the opportunity for verbose negotiations.
The writer is unable to make the trip to New York this week because we wish to start operations on undermining several other farms feeding your water-supply without further loss of time.
We telegraphed you yesterday, as we did because we have not the least desire in the world to discuss terms with you. Eighty-one thousand dollars with $4,860.00 accumulated interest, are our terms. Will you therefore come to time without further parley?
Yours respectfully,
MALONE.

A phone demand brought Attorney Matherson.

"He's going to mine the farms on our watershed!"

"Where?" demanded the lawyer.

A clerk brought in surveys of the country along the Deerlick.

In a fury the magnate pored over the geography of the Deerlick water feed.

"Probably there," said the attorney after several minor officials had been called in consultation. "By the record of elevations above Hartshorn is a stretch of flat country to the west, separated from the Deerlick by a rise of two hundred feet."

Bronson saw the inference.

"If he should blow a hole through that half-mile of plateau it would carry the Deerlick down across the wooded country of Wheelock and into the five-mile lowland swamp around Hastings."

"And if it overflowed," added a geographical expert, "it might divert the entire lower Deerlick across those Hastings farms and join the Algonquin River owned by the Passumpsic folks!"

"Marden," declared the attorney, "you're fighting a Tartar. We haven't any time to appeal to the legislature, because the legislature won't convene until January. You've got to get this fellow appeased—quickly! He may be doing things that are illegal, but that won't unscramble our eggs if he scrambles them at the rate he's been doing the past month."

The conference was interrupted by the foppish secretary.

A special delivery letter had arrived from Smalley.

MY DEAR BRONSON:
There's no more time to parley. Something must be done within twenty-four hours.
This Malone has organized the farmers owning property as far as Number Four, all property back from the flood line and no use to us. They've formed a fifty-thousand-dollar corporation called the Deerlick Homesteaders Company. Sixteen farmers have put in their depreciated farms in return for shares in the corporation. I learn they have lumped their resources and bought explosive—three cars of it. This is no pipe-dream. I've got it straight.
Four of them nearest the river are drilling their properties, and the idea is that, once exploded, the Deerlick will be diverted down into Hastings swamp.
Then they're going to tell us where to go—the same as we told them a year ago when they wanted reimbursement for shrinkage.
The whole country of southern Muskegon has risen against us. The farmers are wild over the success of the explosive used on Hemingway's place. The nerve of the cowman has inspired the whole country.
For the love of all that's holy send that redskin-giant a draft for eighty-five-eight-sixty and have him call it off.
Wire instructions. SMALLEY.

Bronson leaped from his chair.

"—— the day I ever tried to develop their natural resources!" he cried. "That's all you get for helping people——"

"Marden," said the attorney, "don't be an ass! You talk as if building dams were a brand of charity. You're in the business to make money and you don't give a hoot about the rubes—except when they're destroying their property to crimp yours. It'll

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be far less expensive to pay this eighty-odd thousand than try to smother this uprising with the force of courts."

"But he'll rub it into me all the days of my life!"

"Fiddlesticks!"

Then the president of the International Power Development lost his temper.

"Get out! All of you get out!" he roared. Standing before his desk he seemed to dent its ironwood top with the terrific blows delivered by his thunderous fist. "I don't care if he blows the state into a canal on Mars—not a penny, not a farthing, not a bally Chinese sou! Lockwood, go to Newbury on the first train you can catch and swear out a warrant for that man's arrest for conspiracy, arson, shooting his grandmother—any old charge for which an officer will issue a warrant. He's used dynamite. Now, by thunder, I'll use dynamite myself!"

An hour later the following day-letter was on its way to Smalley.

SMALLEY:
Lockwood is on his way West to have Malone arrested. Going to railroad that fellow if it costs a million. Will be my own money, too—not investors'. Immediately on his custody ascertain identity of all investors in Deerlick Company and offer price of their farms—any reasonable figure in exchange for their stock. Get voting majority at any price, but don't buy Malone's share. Report Monday. BRONSON.

The long wire brought the following reply:

BRONSON:
Malone no financier. Broker from Sago City, Montana, A. P. Lamb, has charge of organization. Have sounded him. Think he can be bought. Shall I? SMALLEY.

To which the reply sizzled over the wire.

SMALLEY: If it costs a million. BRONSON.

And in due course came a second answer.

BRONSON:
Am sending the duffer on. Caution.
SMALLEY.

WHEN Marden Bronson entered his office the following morning he found a most picturesque gentleman examining the framed enlargements of power scenes with which the walls were hung.

The gentleman's portly dimensions were packed within a shabby-genteel frock coat; he was smoothly shaven, although the powder of his recent shave failed to hide the rugged bronze of a denizen of the cattle country. He appeared one of those sober-clad clammy individuals who may be worth four million dollars, or agents for "Bypath's History of the Universe," a dollar down and a dollar when they catch you. But there was an unsettled twinkle to his dark-complected eye, and an instant's inventory told the magnate that if this was A. P. Lamb, he was exactly the man for Bronson's purpose.

"Waal," said the Western broker in a "show-me" tone, "I'm here."

"Sit down," said Marden, and he proffered cigars. Then he threw down the gantlet with his customary tactlessness. "How favorable are you to this chap Malone from your state?"

The visitor shifted his gaze from his cigar-ash to the other's combative eye.

"Waal," said he, "there's only two things in the universe I won't sell. One's m' daughter and the other's the barrel to cover m' nakedness after I've sold m' clothes."

"I understand you've been called in to finance a spite company in the Muskegon Mountains."

"I have."

"I'll play with cards face up. How much money would it take to buy a control of that company?"

"Don't know as I can say."

"I don't mean from the farmers. I mean —from you."

The broker rubbed his jaw.

"You mean you want me to sell control of that company to the International Power people?"

"That's what I mean exactly."

"Yaas." The visitor continued to rub his chin and regard the magnate with wry face. "That's kind of crooked, ain't it?"

"Business is war. And all's fair in love and war. My agent in Newbury tells me you have control of this company."

"Yaas, I have. It's a fifty-thousand-dollar corporation and we've only exchanged nineteen thousand of common stock for them farms—so far." He said it with pardonable pride.

"Does that nineteen thousand include the property controlled by this pest Malone?"

"It does."

"The Hemingway property? I understand the farmers wouldn't put in their farms to the north unless Malone contributed his property, already flooded, as

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guarantee of good faith. You see I know a little something about what you fellers are doing, and perhaps I know still more."

A startled expression fled across the furtive eyes of the Montana broker. It was not lost on the power man.

"Yaas," said Lamb hesitatingly. "There's thirty-one thousand of stock yet unissued."

"I'll give you a draft within two minutes for fifteen thousand dollars for that thirty-one thousand dollars' worth of stock."

"In other words, you want me to betray my feller men—a lot of poor devils tryin' to get a little square deal out of an octopus!"

"I want you to sell out to me so I can have the serene enjoyment of walking in to one of their meetings and voting them all into riot."

The broker walked to the window and stood looking out.

"You know this'll put me in Dutch with that big feller, Malone."

"I suppose so."

"I'll have to beat it while the beatin's good. He might get harsh if he ever found me in Jericho—among thieves."

"I'll make it cash for your getaway—if you've got the certificates with you."

"I have."

"Sit down and make them over."

"I'll do it on one condition: you're to withdraw all persecution against Malone. That's only to square me, when he finds out."

Ten minutes later the transfer was made. With eyes popping from his face, he took the bundles of perfectly spendable money that the secretary brought in a valise.

"Here's where I fade!" he said with a weak attempt at pleasantry.

And he did fade. But Bronson was too pleased over the fact that he had bought a controlling interest in the property worth twice the value for fifteen thousand, and knocked the bottom out of his opponents' arsenal to note the direction which Lamb took when he passed through the revolving-doors into the street below.

AT SEVEN-THIRTY that evening Bronson had Malone brought to the Newbury Tavern in the custody of Sheriff Pease, with a crowd of anxious Deerlick stockholders besieging the lobby below.

Bronson stood with his back to the open fire in the best apartment, a huge cigar tilted upward in his harsh mouth, and hands shoved in his stomach pockets, disclosing two watch-chains and a warm vest.

"Well, you ultra-breezy Westerner, seems by the look of your wrist you've struck entanglements."

"Yaas," said Hooty, lighting a brown cigarette with his free hand. "But it took nine men to do it. I'm only toleratin' this chap hitched to me now because I feel sorry enough for his relations already. What's the idea of yankin' me out of that cell? Have you come up to accept my offer?"

"Have I come up to accept your offer? I have not! I've come to see you railroaded! I've got warrants in my pocket for every farmer in your bally little company for conspiracy, and I'm goin' to serve 'em—now, tonight! Your man Lamb has sold you out. We've thrown pickets around the Hemingway property to keep you or yours from touching off more gunpowder. We shall pile cement bags on that property with a new gang of men, let them harden and hold back out-water till Spring. By that time the farms will be condemned by chancery court. Now, then, where do you get off?"

Hooty studied his cigar-ash without change of face.

"My man Lamb has sold me out, hey?"

"For fifteen thousand. I'm now the Deerlick Homesteaders Company."

"Boss," said Hooty, "did you ever hear the yarn o' the feller that found crude-oil spoutin' on his property?"

"What's that got to do with me?"

"You remind me of that feller, boss, bein' so drastic-like. You see, this feller filled a bottle with the stuff and laid it on a shelf. Then he went for his hat and coat, grabbed what he thought was his oil and was about plannin' what he'd do with his fortune when the assayist up and informed him his land was spoutin' paragoric!"

Bronson did not want to smile, but Bronson had to smile, even in his animosity. The face of the cowman betrayed not a wrinkle.

"If you want to leave things without payin' me eighty-one thousand for them farms, well, go ahead and do it—but remember the paragoric."

"You mean you back down?"

"I mean, call off this law on my wrists, give me two hours to get back to Montana and you can have control in the Deerlick Company till there's female suffrage in West Philadelphia."

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Bronson could hardly believe his ears.

"I'll consent to withdraw persecution," said he, "if you agree to remove the dynamite out of the ground in addition."

Two minutes later Hooty met the string-bean individual on the stairs and they went down to the waiting crowd together. But this time the puncher was laughing.

"He didn't only swallow hook, line and sinker," guffawed the cowman, "he even dressed himself for the fryin'-pan and hopped in with a nightie o' Indian meal. He's given me a writ of immunity from persecution, now and forever, and agreed not to shove you chaps for conspiracy. Now be quick, Hemingway, gimme that minute-book o' our directors' meetin's. And you kid—get me my grip! Little old Montana for mine on the morrow, where they do things on the square! I signed over our stock to him, and then I told him there wasn't another pound of powder anywhere in the ground, and we never bought a pound for the farms up the river. I swore it in front of Pease, who's a notary, and you ought to see his face, boys. Say, it looked like a bunch of us Pawnee fellers who once serenaded a girl when I was in college. The girl's father came out at the end of an hour, told us he'd enjoyed our concert first-rate, that the girl was visitin' her aunt in Idaho and the next time we pulled the stunt to choose somethin' else than the bath-room window. Good-by, boys. Keep your upper lip stiff and your faces closed. I'll be back in a year when the virus has worked. So long!"

With a furtive glance at the stairs Hooty shoved the corporation minute-book into his huge suit-case and was striding for the station with the eight-o'clock train tooting two miles above the town.

III

IN A massive room of a private New York banking-house the directors of International Power were in session assembled. At the head of the lion-footed table sat President Bronson.

Attorney Matherson arose and took his cigar from his mouth.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I move that a vote of thanks be placed in the minutes for President Bronson's efficient management of the International Power Company. The fact, gentlemen, that we have today authorized a dividend of nearly half a million dollars on our Deerlick properties—a profit of about eighty thousand dollars per reservoir—should constitute cause for recorded recognition of his executive ability."

The company's counsel, a heavy shareholder himself, paused to gaze reminiscently at the ash of his heavy cigar.

"I recall, gentlemen," said he with twinkling eye, "a circumstance particularly indicative of this in connection with the location of Number Five. Some of you are familiar with the episode, but all may not be cognizant of Mr. Bronson's success. There were many private property-holders who objected, for personal reasons, to the good work going forward. A rather drastic Montana cattleman secured title to properties adjacent to our basin and loaded them with explosive."

Matherson's speech was interrupted by the office messenger.

"Begging your pardon, gentlemen, there's a chap out here says if you don't let him in, he'll come through the glass with the help of a chair-leg!"

"Highly picturesque and extremely Western," commented a smug little man with Depew whiskers. "What's his name?"

"Malone."

The door suddenly banged open and without waiting for invitation, Hooty stalked into the room.

He looked no different than two years before, except that he seemed a trifle taller, more dynamic, a bit more bronzed. He wore the same huge sombrero; his clothes still exhibited the suggestion of a blanketed Rocky Mountain; and as he approached the table the previous suggestion was manifest—an attempt to cram half a dozen miles of Montana sky-line into a forty-inch trunk.

After him followed A. P. Lamb.

A. P. Lamb had changed. A. P. Lamb had grown whiskers—two enormous horse-tail mustaches that fell from either side his mouth like tusks on a walrus. And, instead of Lamb, he now answered to the name of Cole with the badge of a Montana sheriff glinting beneath his lapel.

"Well," demanded Bronson, "have you come back for more?"

"Hello, skunk," retorted Hooty. "Sure I've come back. Did you ever see a Montana Irishman who didn't come back?"

"Why didn't you honor that thousand-dollar check when I presented it for payment?"

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"Because you ain't yet won that bet!"

"Didn't win the bet! Why not?"

Hooty laid hands on two chair-backs, whose seats were filled with directors. He emptied them by the simple expedient of withdrawing said seats and leaving the two financiers to meet the floor with disconcerting thump.

"The East," he snapped, "should remember its manners!"

The directors got to their feet. The noise was alarming, for the directors had gout.

"Have a chair, King! Out West we never keep a man standin' when he comes on business."

"Have a care!" roared Bronson. "I hold in my pockets your bogus check! I'll——"

"Sit down, you folks. We'll discuss that check."

"This is a directors' meeting of the International Power Development Company. You can see me on private matters at my office afterward."

"If I'd wanted to see you at your office, I'd go there afterward. I want to see the International Power Company's directors, so I'm right here now. I understand you've just become the successors and assigns of the Deerlick Power Company, closed it out, assumed its assets and liabilities, and that you've paid a dividend on those properties."

"That's none of your business."

"Oh, yes, it happens to be my business, because two years ago Thursday, old hoss, I made it my business. I told you it would cost you three times as much for being peevish and stingy and given to hogging the whole Muskegon power development apple —even to the core. I always did love to twist the tail of the guy that says, 'There ain't goin' to be no core.'

"So when you got real generous about bettin' two whole cents that the farmers wouldn't get theirs, I just natcherly had to give you the rope to swing yourself and incidentally cough up that apple when the noose tightened. I said the farmers would get theirs. And they've been real patient this past year till I got the Fall beeves off for Chicago so's I could ring in on this meetin' and demonstrate that it's a good thing the West is on the square. Because if a Westerner wanted to be crooked he could swipe the clothes off the statue o' Miss Liberty and use 'em to gag New York while he run off to Jersey City with the subtreasury. You see I was elected treasurer of the Deerlick Homesteaders Company——"

"You were voted out of office over a year ago."

"Sure, a freeze-out! But you don't yet grasp the magnitude o' my repetory. When you had me pinched I happened to have with me the minute-book of the corporation."

"So *that's* where the minute-book went!" exclaimed Bronson.

"And you was in such an all-fired hurry to run me out I didn't think it was necessary to send it back."

"Well, what's that got to do with interrupting this meeting?"

"I come to return that minute-book!"

"Charming!" retorted Bronson. "Hand it over and get out. I'll see you after we adjourn."

"Don't harp so much on one subject!" exclaimed Hooty. "It gets monotonous. What's more, get it out o' your naked noodle that I've arrived to hold a chin concert with you. I'm here to see your directors. Shut up!"

"I made you sweat once," roared Bronson. "I'll make you sweat again!"

"King, gag that nuisance. I want to address the multitude."

An admonishing gesture from Matherson dispersed the rising hostilities.

"Now then, Matherson," began the puncher, "heave language from your system as per insinuations from page seven of that there volume."

Matherson picked up the minute-book curiously. He turned to the page, read silently, frowned. Then as the import struck him, his face grew white and he slid the open page with brittle silence to Bronson.

"Read it!" bellowed Hooty.

"Be it ordered," read Bronson, "that we, the Directors of the Deerlick Homesteaders Company, in addition to said shares of stock accepted in lieu of our several properties, issue notes to the amount of eighty-one thousand dollars with interest at six per cent. as additional security. Said notes are to mature on the day that the Deerlick Company, its successors or assigns, pass a dividend sufficient to cover the amount of those notes, and these notes are to be considered as duly recognized liabilities of the Deerlick Company and holden on any of its successors or assigns to pay in full at said maturity with interest."

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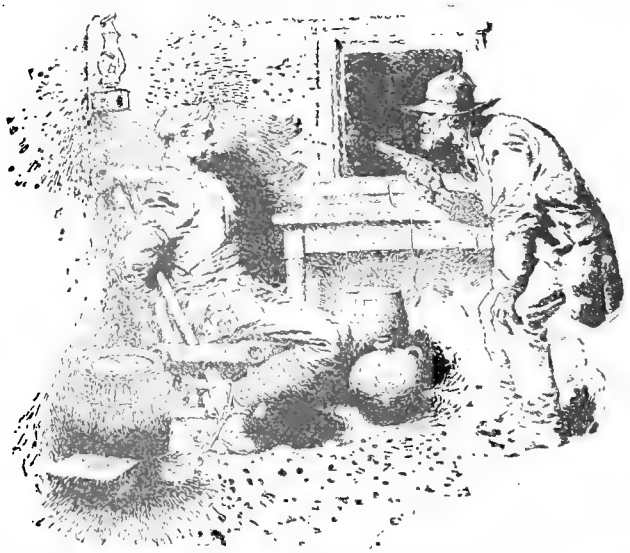
Bronson put down the book softly. He put it down tragically.

"Gentlemen," he cried hoarsely, "we're buncoed!"

"Not speakin' o' that fifteen thousand you generously heaped on Ole King Cole or them two cents I got comin'—I should certainly say you are!" replied Hooty.

BURNING MOUNTAIN

By Robert J Pearsall



Author of "The Reformation of Carabao," "Anting-Anting," etc.

IN MAUBAN, of all island towns known to the American soldier, men that are wise look most carefully to the conduct of their lives. The spirit of the place is symbolized by the forever unquiet waters of the Illana, tempestuous, treacherous, shark-filled, that wash it on the west.

On the east the great Bukidanao Peak, charred from foot to summit when I last saw it, overhangs it like an elemental threat. To the north and south is an evil-smelling jungle. The town itself is a haphazard huddle of squalid nipa shacks.

The streets are narrow, crooked and sandy, quivering in the heat. Naked children are everywhere, vying for room with half-starved dogs, lean and unhappy hogs, and sleek game-cocks. Brown, breech-clouted men and half-clad women, each with their inevitable *londre* cigar or *dhobie* cigarette, sprawl on their bamboo floors, or loll in the shade of the drooping palms. Over all is the maddening hum of the malaria-breeding mosquito, cut through at intervals by the rasp of the cicada, or the monotonous call of a lonely gecko. Unrest envelopes the village like a feverish mist.

It was to Mauban that Sergeant Cavannagh—young, strong, untouched by any of the vices of the East, and measurably conscious of his virtue—came during the last year of his first enlistment. On his second evening there, entering with Sergeant O'Mally the one ramshackle restaurant that catered to the mess-wearied appetites of the American soldiers, he stopped just inside the door, straightened his six-foot frame tensely, and stared with wide, startled eyes at the girl behind the cashier's desk.

"In Heaven's name, O'Mally," he whispered, "who's that?"

"I was thinkin' you'd take notice," exulted O'Mally. "But 'tis no use; she's as onreachable as the moon. 'Twas Captain Hendricks himself that would 'a' married her, I do believe, had she but raised the tip of her finger. But she wouldn't even let

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him walk her home. And Sergeant McBride——"

"I didn't ask you that," Cavannagh's voice rang coldly. "Who is she?"

Then O'Mally sobered quickly and told Cavannagh how Ailleen had grown up in Mauban, like a white lily springing from black muck. How an American adventurer, harried out of Hongkong, had come to Manila years before the American occupation; how he had there married a Spanish woman; how they had drifted to Mauban, where Ailleen had been born; and how the father, three months later, had been caught in the tightening coil of American law and sent to Bilibid. For exactly what offense O'Mally did not know. But a little later the mother had died, and Ailleen, a baby, had been adopted by the family of the *presidente.*

She had been reared with the children of her foster-parents, and taught English at the native school, and now, fortune's wheel having lowered the *presidente* to the position of restaurant-keeper, she was repaying him for her keep.

"She's a magnet for trade," said O'Mally. "There's more men come here from empty hearts than bellies."

And Cavannagh, by now seated at a table, cursed under his breath and condemned all Governor - Generals from Dewey's time down for permitting a white girl such rearing.

" 'Twas nobody's business," said O'Mally, "or everybody's, which is the same thing in the tropics. Besides, 'twas all done legally—the adoption, I mean. And when you consider the result, man, 'twould seem 'twas not done ill."

"She's a miracle," said Cavannagh, looking at her with the same wide, wondering eyes.

Indeed, there was none that knew her but that would agree with him. A white goddess she seemed to us all in Mauban; petal-lipped and star-eyed; camisa-clad, but graceful as a wind - bowed willow; sun-browned, but with delicately molded features that cried out her race; in that town of alien custom pure as the evening dew. Something divine, but something very preciously human, too.

Cavannagh saw all that, and more. To him she was from his first glance the one woman of his life. And it may be that to Ailleen also love came as quickly, even though, in the way of women, it was months before she would confess it.

ANYWAY, within two weeks Cavannagh was escorting her home of nights. It was the second night that Cavannagh got his first sight of Asholt, sometimes called the "Gugu Lover," who was, besides Ailleen, the only white civilian in Mauban.

It was such a brilliant, star and moon lit night as one finds only in the tropics. The noises of the village were hushed; the soft, warm air was like a caress; the multitudinous voices of the jungle blended into elemental harmony. For once Mauban was beautiful. And then, as Ailleen and Cavannagh turned a corner, Ugliness came back to earth in the person of a drunken man, approaching from the opposite direction.

At first sight Cavannagh took him for a native. He was no taller than one, though broad and powerful-looking. His khaki trousers did not fit, and his flannel shirt was torn and almost buttonless; moreover, he was barefooted. But as he came closer it became apparent that under his matted black beard were the marred features of a white man.

With a muttered exclamation of repugnance, Cavannagh drew Ailleen well to the right to leave room for the other to pass without contact. But the drunken man looked up, saw them, started, gave a low, involuntary cry in which astonishment, anger, and fear were curiously blended, and came to a reeling pause directly in front of them.

"*Buenos noches!*" he greeted them, peering inquisitively at Cavannagh's face.

"Good evening!" rapped Cavannagh harshly.

"Wait a minute!" The man kept his position in front of them. "I ain't seen you before," he said to Cavannagh. "You newcomer?" He tried to speak affably, but there was ill-concealed hostility in his manner.

"What do you want?" asked Cavannagh impatiently.

Suddenly, as Cavannagh reached out to push him aside, the man's liquor-weakened self-control broke down and he began to babble, half incoherently:

"I want to know you—that's what I want. I want to know, are you a good man? I want to know why 'Girl That Walks Alone'—why she *ain't* alone. I——"

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Cavannagh sent him to the ground with one sweep of his arm. The man rose slowly and stood staring stupidly after the retreating couple. But neither looked back.

Ailleen had whispered Asholt's name, and Cavannagh already knew his history by hearsay. He was a beach-comber who had come to Mauban three years before, and who by now controlled the town's liquor traffic. Much money he had made out of it, and some accredited him with a worse and more profitable traffic. Avarice seemed to be his principal characteristic. He had been heard to say that he had sold his soul for money, and would sell his body, too, if he could get a price. He lived alone in miserly fashion well up on the side of Bukidanao, ate of native fare, drank of his own *vino*, and visited the village only to sell, never to buy.

"If I'd known who it was," said Cavannagh, "I'd have hit him hard. I only hope he gives me another chance."

But Asholt had been in an exceptional condition that night. He was a constant drinker, but rarely a heavy one. Thereafter, when the two met, he eyed Cavannagh with malevolence that seemed to have something of madness in it, but gave him the full width of the street. A bit of a coward was Asholt—indeed, a broken, slinking, miserable man, in whom it had taken not only strong drink, but a very strong emotion, to arouse even the faint courage that Cavannagh had witnessed.

AS PAY-DAY succeeded pay-day, Cavannagh grew to detest the beach-comber more. He saw how cleverly he played upon the weaknesses of the men. In some way, even if he had to give it away, he would get liquor into the barracks on pay-day night. A small quantity, widely distributed, would whet but not satisfy the appetites of the jungle-sated soldiers. Once started, the majority of them would make his shack their rendezvous until their pay was gone. It was a devilish game, played with the cunning of the devil.

But Cavannagh, too, was playing his game, the old, old game of courtship. So he had little thought to waste upon Asholt. Subconsciously he knew that the latter hated him with a constantly increasing malignity; he read it in Asholt's sidelong glance, in his grimacing lips, in the sudden stiffening of Asholt's body whenever the two met. Cavannagh repaid the hatred with contempt and troubled himself no more about it.

Three months after they met, Ailleen and Cavannagh became engaged. They were to be married shortly before his discharge, which was to take place in six weeks. Then a transport journey home, and the beginning of a new life for Cavannagh and a new world for Ailleen.

Cavannagh wished he had something besides his scanty finals and the power of his arms and brain to give his bride. But he had the sure courage of strength, and no fear of not being able to make his way.

Then the unexpected happened. There was trouble in Luzon and a quick shift of troops. Officers were scarce, and the captain in command at Mauban received orders to report in Manila.

Cavannagh, who had been acting first sergeant, now found himself in charge of the garrison, vested with the authority and responsibilities that ordinarily go only with shoulder-straps.

Obviously, one must stack the red chips of manhood pretty high to win promotion from private to first sergeant in the space of a regular's hitch. Cavannagh was very proud of this accomplishment and of his military record, and most anxious that nothing should happen to blemish it. And he thought he saw, in his increased trust that had been reposed in him, a very good chance of just this happening.

More clearly than had his officer, Cavannagh had seen, from pay-day to pay-day, the command draw closer to real trouble. The men had been in sun-tortured Mauban too long. Each month-end found their nerves strained to the breaking-point. The money and consequent *vino* snapped their self-restraint. Some of the best of them were on the point of doing things for which they would afterward be very sorry, and Cavannagh knew it.

He knew, too, how he was handicapped in controlling them. A sergeant's chevrons are but poor substitutes for a captain's silver bars. But he could only do his best. And one thing he *would* do, he resolved—keep the liquid tinder, wherewith Asholt kindled the periodical fires of revolt, out of the garrison.

So with a perfectly clear conscience he spied on the men, learned Asholt's plan, and

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shortly after dark, pay-day night, went out to spoil it.

The place chosen for the landing of the *vino* was about a hundred yards below the makeshift dock. Cavannagh took his stand openly on the beach. Shortly afterward the receiving committee came along, recognized him, and retreated disconcertedly.

Cavannagh smiled grimly and waited. Five minutes later there came from seaward the swish of a buried outrigger.

The sail of a *banco* grew out of the night; it sped smartly toward Cavannagh. Its prow hit the sand; with a low hail to the ill-defined figure waiting, its solitary occupant sprang out and beached his boat. Then he turned. Cavannagh had moved up to within arm's-length of him. Asholt recognized him.

"The same old trick, eh, Asholt? No, you don't!"

Asholt had thrown himself against the prow of his *banco* in a wild effort to shove it off and escape; but Cavannagh's hand closed mercilessly on the neckband of his shirt, and drew him back.

"Come here!" Cavannagh hauled him well up on the beach, and released him with a contemptuous shove.

"I wonder if you know just how much of a cur you are," he spoke measuredly. "I think the lowest of all men in the world is a renegade panderer, a shame - forsaken wretch who tries to make his living by dragging other men down to his own level. Why there's a law against killing such vermin I don't know. But I do know this—if I ever catch you on the reservation again, or in Mauban, I'll more than half turn the trick, law or no law. Understand? I'll beat you till you whine. And that goes whether you're peddling your rotten drink or not. Your place is with the natives. And now, unship that cargo of yours."

"What do you mean, sergeant?"

"That *vino*—and be quick about it."

There was a threat in Cavannagh's voice; and Asholt answered it with bungling haste. He climbed into the *banco*, upended the keg of *vino* and tipped it over the side. He followed it and rolled it out of the wash of water to where Cavannagh stood. Cavannagh bent, picked up a heavy rock and smashed in the head of the keg. Instantly the air was filled with the sweetish-sickly odor of the outpouring *vino*.

Asholt for the first time expressed resentment; he began to curse in a grumbling way. Cavannagh laughed.

"That hurts, does it? Shut up! A white man's a fool to waste temper on such as you. Get back on board."

"By——! I'll get you for this, Cavannagh," Asholt mumbled, retreating. "And for——"

Cavannagh's hands suddenly closed on Asholt's shoulders like a vise. Asholt writhed and twisted, and, without knowing how it happened, found himself with his back to Cavannagh, his arms pinned to his side, and being propelled in that position ignominiously toward the *banco*. The gunwale caught him at the knees; a vigorous shove sent him sprawling into the bottom of the boat.

Cavannagh drew back, seized the prow, and with one great heave sent the craft spinning away from the land. He stooped and rinsed his hands in the salt water.

"I'll teach him," he muttered, turning back toward the barracks. "I don't think he'll try that stunt again. As for getting me—why, he'd better look out. They say he peddles opium as well as booze. I'd like to put him where he belongs before I draw my finals, and that's in Bilibid."

So open war was declared between them. For a time Asholt had all the advantage. In his stock of trade he had a powerful weapon, and vindictively he struck at the discipline of Cavannagh's command.

He no more tried to run liquor in; but in his shack on the side of Bukidanao it flowed like water. For the first time he violated his cardinal principle of "Cash only." "Jawbone" was as good as gold. The only limit of a man's power to purchase was his power to consume.

Of course, there were those that kept their heads, but the majority of the men went wild. Discipline rapidly slackened. Privates and the younger non-coms drank together, and, having drunk, fought. Men mounted guard reeling, and when Cavannagh relieved them and placed them under arrest, he would find the supernumeraries also drunk. Each morning found half a dozen or more absent over leave.

Within a few days there was no more room left in the guard tent for prisoners. It was a contagion of madness. The entire breakdown of the command seemed imminent.

For a furtive whisper began to pervade

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the camp of a wilder thing to come. The plan was ill-formed as yet, but it embraced mutiny. There was a country to the south, as yet unexplored by white men, where gold was to be found in the creek-beds and gullies — richer deposits than those of '49. Desolate and precipitous mountains guarded it on all sides. But where was there ever an obstacle impossible to a *vino*-driven imagination?

Some morning, it was prophesied, the command would wake to find half its number departed on that quest. Asholt had started the fable, impressing it upon the consciousness of fuddled men. Later, they remembered the story, but forgot its source. And, wishing to believe, they did.

CAVANNAGH did his best. He had the active man's belief in the sedative value of much physical exertion; and he doubled the drill, increased the guard duty, found police work for the men to do in the cool of the day. While they worked he worked with them and talked with them, trying without preaching to brace them up, to make them remember their white manhood and the honor of the uniform they wore.

But most of them he could not reach in that way. His only reward was an increasingly sullen obedience. He knew the time close at hand when even that would cease, when the incipient mutiny would become actual.

To give him his due, his dread of this outcome was more for their sakes than for his. His career as a soldier would indeed be blemished; but some of their lives would be altogether ruined.

"It's their fault, of course," he said one night to Ailleen; "but if Asholt were out of the way it'd all stop. And the little finger of any one of them is worth more than his whole carcass."

"You know, dear," said Ailleen, very slow and careful with her English, "it is hard to understand. Always he has cared only for money, but now he cares for it no longer. For if he did, he would sell for money and not for chits he can never collect—they are a joke. All he cares for is to make men drunk. Why?"

"He's got it in for me, that's all," replied Cavannagh gloomily. "After all, I'm to blame, I guess. I handled him too roughly. I tried to bluff him, and I can't make good my bluff."

"It is true that he hates you, and that is very funny, too. I have seen him looking at you sometimes—before this last trouble —and I have been afraid. It was like the look of a *juramatado*. If he could die killing you, he would be happy. Why is it? Other soldiers have struck him. That was nothing."

"I'm glad of that, anyway," muttered Cavannagh. "The hate of his sort is mighty flattering."

"I've always wondered about him," pursued Ailleen thoughtfully. "Of course he's bad, but he sometimes used to talk to me, and—well, then I felt he was good. I couldn't help it. I liked him, then. And I thought he liked me. I was never afraid of him."

Cavannagh changed the subject. Being young, he saw everything in solid black and white; that there could be any good in Asholt seemed impossible. But that was no night for argument between Ailleen and him.

For the next day she was to marry him. Cavannagh's transport was to sail within three weeks' time, the passenger-list was already being made up, and Cavannagh must produce evidence that he had a wife before he could procure transportation for two. No one was to be told as yet. Ailleen's foster-parents would be sure to object strenuously—indeed, they had already objected strenuously to Cavannagh's suit—and both agreed that the shorter the period of contention the better.

In the neighboring village of Matazlan lived the Spanish *padre* who was to unite them. At half-past ten the next morning the two lovers met on the trail a mile out of Mauban. Very adorable Ailleen looked, soft-eyed, a strange new timidity upon her. And very proud and very humble felt Cavannagh, as they set out on their wedding journey.

THEY returned early that afternoon, Ailleen to her home and Cavannagh to the barracks. Nor did they see much more than usual of each other the next few days.

Cavannagh found himself increasingly beset with difficulties. Most of the men had passed from the first wild but good-natured frenzy of debauch to red-eyed and evil-tempered perpetual hangovers. Cavannagh was compelled against his will to palter with

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them, to ease down on the tightened reins of discipline, to go back to the old routine. He felt his orders losing force daily. Complete anarchy threatened. Whether it came in the form of wholesale desertion, or of open mutiny in camp, mattered little. It would be equally a blot on his record, equally ruinous to the men, and equally a triumph for Asholt.

Then that happened for which Cavannagh had been wishing and angling. One afternoon a Filipino *muchacho*, playing his part of a reward-seeking informer remarkably well, came to his office. He would speak with the sergeant alone; he had heard the sergeant would pay him for what he had to tell; but he was afraid to speak openly. Asholt was a very evil man, and . . . .

Cavannagh walked him to the middle of the parade-ground and bought the supposed information for a ten-*peso* bill.

It was true Asholt dealt in opium, selling it to the rich merchants and to the *dattos* further south. A fresh tin had come by carrier from Manila but the night before. The *muchacho* had seen it come, and had seen, too, where it was hidden — not in Asholt's shack, but in a certain place under a rock. It could not be told; it was very skilfully hidden; but if Cavannagh would come alone to Asholt's shack, say at two o'clock in the morning, when there would be no one about, he would be shown. Later he could return with witnesses and seize the opium. But this time he must come alone, for no one but Cavannagh must know who had told. And he, the *muchacho*, was a very poor man, and his wife grown infirm.

Cavannagh promised the men ten *pesos* more if he kept the appointment. Shortly after midnight, he himself was on his way to it. He started early, for he had determined to take an entirely untraveled route. He would run no chance of some one seeing him, following him, and warning Asholt.

It was near the end of the dry season, and the shrubbery and grasses crackled under Cavannagh's feet. Especially was the old, dead growth dry, a very fine tinder for a quick fire it would make, and there was plenty of it.

A fine, powdery dust rose about Cavannagh as he trampled it. The strong, constant trade-wind drove it up the slope ahead of him. So, Cavannagh reflected with a faint, premonitory sense of danger, would sparks travel, and a fire advance.

It was a hard climb. In places the ascent was so steep that Cavannagh had to worm his way up, lying flat against the side of the cliff, using toe-hold and fingernail, fighting for every inch of distance gained. Again he found the shrubbery so dense that he must crawl over it instead of through it, only to have it give way under him often, plunging him into a suffocating labyrinth of twisted branches and dried leaves. He might have worked over to the left, hit the trail, and gone up easily enough. But he clung to his original design.

After nearly two hours of this, however, Cavannagh came to one of the two sheer precipices that, closing in on each other at a sharp angle, formed the notch in which Asholt had built his shack. Cavannagh worked his way along the bottom of this precipice until the shack itself loomed darkly before him. Then he stopped and studied the contour of the cliff until he saw the peculiarly shaped jutting rock under which the native had promised to meet him.

He made his way to it, consulted his watch, and whistled softly. There was no answer. The native had failed of his tryst.

There was a slight, rustling sound behind Cavannagh. Instantly there swept over him such an instinctive sense of danger as one feels at the near-by rattle of a hidden snake. But before he could even start to turn, something cold and round was pressed against the back of his neck.

The deadly intimation of the touch was paralyzing. He stood still. He felt a knife slip beneath his cartridge-belt, one smooth slash, and it and his revolver fell to the ground.

"Straight ahead you go," came Asholt's unmistakable, liquor - hoarsened voice. "Don't you move any faster 'n this revolver o' mine does, or you'll never feel nothin' more but bullets. I ain't takin' no chances. We're goin' to my house."

Asholt had shifted the muzzle of his revolver to the small of Cavannagh's back. He started forward, and Cavannagh moved very obediently ahead of him. In that fashion they approached the rear of the shack, rounded it to the left, and entered the open door.

"Set down!"

Asholt placed his free hand on Cavannagh's shoulder and pressed him into a chair. He scratched a match and lit a flickering oil-lamp. The squalid disorder of the

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room, with its ragged bamboo furniture, empty jugs and bottles, dirty earthen drinking-cups, corresponded well with its indescribable corrupt odor.

Asholt's weapon never abandoned its deadly proximity to some portion of Cavannagh's body. At Asholt's command he crossed his wrists behind the back of his chair. A noosed rope was passed over them, drawn tight, wound many times, and tied. Ropes already spiked to the floor were used to bind his ankles. When Cavannagh was securely fastened, Asholt stepped around in front of him and surveyed him with a half-maniacal stare of hate.

"Well, I got you, I guess!" he exulted. "Never thought while you was schemin' against him that the old beach-comber'd have brains enough to set a little trap himself, did you?"

"You've brains enough when it comes to deviltry," said Cavannagh. "Now you've got me, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to kill you," said Asholt.

THE end of a string dangled through the one window of the room. Asholt backed toward it, keeping his eyes on Cavannagh, took hold of it and pulled it slowly and carefully. With a satisfied grunt he released it and came back in front of Cavannagh.

"There, that done it. You're as dead now as if you was in your grave, your highmightiness."

"Pshaw!" scoffed Cavannagh. "You've an instinct for melodramatics, haven't you? Do you think you can scare me? You haven't nerve enough to kill me. If you have, why don't you shoot me, and be done with it?"

"And run chances of havin' the shot heard, or of some one findin' your body with a hole in it? Not me! I don't take no chances. I can't afford to, with Ailleen waitin'——"

The unexpected mention of his wife's name destroyed Cavannagh's composure.

"What have you to do with her, you dirty blackguard?" he demanded. "Why, you're not fit——"

"O-ho, I forgot! You don't understand. And I guess it's only right you should, before you die. Do you think I'm killin' you because you knocked me down and spilled my *vino*, and tried to put me out of business? Oh, no, though I got that against you, too. It's for the way you come a-cozenin' around the finest girl that ever lived —that's why. And,—— you! You deserve to die. You and all the rest of 'em. But you're the only one she ever took to, so you're the one to go."

"You drink-besotted fool," snarled Cavannagh, "if you dare hint——"

"If burnin' wasn't worse than shootin'," cried Asholt in a sudden fury, "I'd plug you right now and take chances on it."

"Burning!" Cavannagh echoed. "You're lying again."

The statement began as a sneer but ended with a faint tremor of apprehension. For, now that his attention was called to it, the dirty odor of the room was giving way to the unmistakable smell of a forest fire.

"I thought that'd get under your hide. Yes, the woods is afire. That little pull on the string did it—it was just a case of pullin' a burnin' lamp like this, hidden in the bushes down the mountain a ways, under some oiled rags. And I soaked the brush with coal-oil clear across the notch, so's to give it a wide front. It's comin' hell-bent-for-election now, with the wind drivin' it!

"Sit still, or I'll cripple you up a bit with a club. I don't want to break no bones, but I don't want you traipsin' around, either. Though there's no chance of gettin' away. Listen! You can hear it now."

From down the cañon, penetrating the thin walls of the *nipa* shack, came a roaring as of a mighty and full-drafted furnace, punctuated by incessant crackling. Cavannagh was not lacking in imagination. He saw already the flying line of fire, the twisted eddies of flame, the wake of burning coals; he felt the shriveling touch upon his flesh. But he turned to Asholt with a derisive smile.

"You've bungled murder the same as you've bungled everything else in life. No man alive could climb the cliffs fast enough to get away. You'll die with me."

"That's what them that look for me'll think, though they'll never find my body. But I'll be in Manila—quite a different man, I promise you—quite a gentleman, with the money I've been makin' and scrapin' together for the last four years. Then I'll send for Ailleen, and——"

"Ailleen again!" rasped Cavannagh harshly. "You *are* insane! You think she'll come to you?"

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"She'll come, and she'll be glad to come," said Asholt, and Cavannagh, even in his fury and fear, caught the touch of pride in his voice. "Not to *me*, but to Amos Hemphill, her father, which I don't mind tellin' to a dead man is the same thing. And then I'll take her to the States—I got money enough for that. I'll give her the chance she ought to have—in a white woman's country."

"Her father!" cried Cavannagh incredulously. "You—you lie."

"Do I?" asked Asholt with an unfamiliar calm certitude in his voice, as if his mind had seized upon the one salient and enduring fact of his life. "Think a bit."

Cavannagh was already thinking. Swiftly he correlated Ailleen's history, the mystery of Asholt's life before he came to Mauban, Asholt's hitherto inexplicable attitude toward himself, Ailleen's strange liking for Asholt, and Asholt's seemingly mad words tonight, with this amazing statement, and straightway it ceased to be amazing. But *he* her father! He recoiled from the idea.

"There's a difference between us, I'll admit," went on Asholt grimly. "If you served fifteen years in Bilibid you'd go down some, too. But when I come out and see how she was livin', and with men like you gallivantin' around her, I couldn't let her out of my sight again. And I saw a chance to make money, and I did. And everybody's despised me, and I've despised myself; but I'm glad I did. For the sake of my little girl, I am."

By the sound of it, the fire was almost upon them now, and the air of the room was hot and stifling. Death leaped upon the cabin; but Cavannagh's mind was still bewildered by the shock of that absorbing discovery, and Asholt seemed lost in contemplation of his sacrifice and triumph. Cavannagh marveled, leaning forward:

"You've done all this for her! Great God! And I thought— But why are you killing me? For her sake, too?"

"Didn't I tell you! Yes. To save her from you. It was the only way."

"But I loved her, too, Asholt. *Loved* her, do you understand? And we've been married a week."

Asholt's jaw dropped. His gloating triumph fell from him like a mask. He slumped forward in his chair and stared at Cavannagh with frightened eyes.

"You—married?" he began brokenly.

"If you feel in my left blouse pocket," said Cavannagh, "you'll find our marriage certificate."

Like a frenzied tiger, Asholt leaped at Cavannagh, tore open the pocket and yanked out the paper. Unfolding it, he gave it one glance and then began to shudder. His very form seemed to shrivel in the intensity of his despair. His eyes were full of self-abhorrence. In that moment he saw his life of shameful folly crowned by the most terrible folly of all.

"And I've killed you!" he cried.

"Come out of it, man!" snapped Cavannagh. "I'm not dead yet. You were going to get away."

"That's right! That's right—I forgot! It ain't too late." Asholt had drawn a clasp knife from his pocket, and was madly slashing at Cavannagh's bonds. "Did I cut ye? But—come!"

Asholt dashed for the door, with Cavannagh following him.

But as they opened it, flame burst in upon them. Afterward, Cavannagh knew that Asholt had miscalculated the speed of the flames and delayed too long—that, even if the near-murderer had clung to his original plan, he would have died with his victim.

Tongues of flame were licking the roof and the sides of the shack, and on either end the fiery front had bent around it, so it was almost enveloped.

How he kept in touch with Asholt, getting out, Cavannagh did not know, for his arms were folded over his face, and he ran blindly. But somehow he found himself racing in Asholt's wake toward the steep cliff at the end of the notch. The fire was at their very heels, and stayed there; they ran half strangled in smoke and oxygenless air; the upward sloping cañon was like a chimney now, and the wind had increased to a gale.

"Keep close to me—there's a tunnel!" called Asholt, and his voice in the midst of the roar was like a wail.

"Tunnel or not," thought Cavannagh, "we're both dead men."

For he knew that even a tunnel would be filled with tinder—old dead growth, and dry grass and leaves and twigs carried into it by the eternal trade-wind. He knew, too, that the flames, reaching the head of the cañon, would be sucked through any possibly existing tunnel as through the flue of a

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stove. Asholt realized this, too, for as Cavannagh overtook him and they ran side by side, he managed to gasp out:

"I've bungled—again. I meant to get away, ahead of the fire. But it's a little opening—or I couldn't 'a' kept it secret. And you're her husband—and a better man 'an me, and— After all, it ain't good—for the dead to come back—and I've been dead a long time. So I'll do it—for her sake."

Cavannagh did not know what it was he was going to do. But he got a hint of it when, just as they reached the end of the cañon, Asholt cried out clearly above the roaring and crackling and rushing wind:

"The money I made—it belongs to her and you. And it's buried under the square stone—at the other end of the tunnel—to the right."

ABOVE rose the cliff, covered with the already kindling débris of a century of tropical growth. But Asholt dove at the base of it and began to work furiously, throwing dead brush to either side. An opening was revealed, four feet high and no wider than a man's body.

"Go on," he rasped at Cavannagh. "Get in. There's no time——"

Driven as much by the imperative urge of Asholt's voice as by the instinct of self-preservation, Cavannagh took the chance. With his back blistering, he dove head foremost through the opening.

Dense smoke, through which shot licking tongues of flame, followed him, so that for one agonized moment he thought he had found his grave. But the next moment the air cleared and cooled inexplicably, and he was able to crawl on.

The passage widened, and he shot one look back. Enough of the flames broke through that he saw outlined something that was the shape of a human body pressed tightly against the mouth of the tunnel. And he fancied that the wild cry that came to his ears had a high note of triumph in it, as if an imprisoned and tortured soul had found freedom at the end.

And Cavannagh went on and on, and the tunnel opened into a ravine, and he blocked the mouth of it with rocks, so the fire could not break through. Then he took the hidden money, as Asholt had bidden him, and went back to Mauban and to Ailleen—and with Ailleen to the States, and to a nobler life than he had ever conceived. For with him went a newly learned humility and the urge of a magnificent memory. Accepting Asholt's sacrifice he had laid upon himself the lash of a tremendous obligation.

To this day, in sun-scorched Mauban, the name of Asholt is as the name of a saint. For, while still the smoke of burning Bukidanao blackened the sky, the story of his passing went the rounds, trimmed only of such intimate details as Cavannagh chose to keep for Ailleen's ears alone. And, whether wisely or foolishly, the simple natives chose to see in Asholt's end a glory eclipsing the evil of his life, and transcending earthly mortality.

LIFE

BY MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

Thunder at my ears, Life
Blunder with my soul,
Dog me, throw me, tie me,
Swerve me from my goal.

Do your worst, I'll worst you!
Do your best, I'll win!
Blind my eyes with beauty,
Snare my feet with sin.

Still I'll win the struggle,
Still I'll triumph, I!
For I last forever!
Life, you have to die.

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GASTON OLAF

A ~ THREE PART STORY ~ PART ONE

by Henry Oyen

Author of "The Snow Burner," "The Man Trail," etc.

GASTON OLAF FRANCOIS THORSON, to give him at once his full, complicated name, raced with easy strides of his long skis to the crest of the ridge and stood for a moment against the sky-line, looking down upon the new woods settlement known as Havens Falls.

From the tips of his rubber-shod feet, resting lightly on his skis, to the short bronze curls which flamed beneath his muskrat cap, the six-foot-two of Gaston Olaf was alive to the point of bursting. Though the late Winter morning was raw and cold, he wore no mackinaw. His blue-flannel shirt, stretching taut across the swell of his chest, was open wide at the top. Cloth and buttons were not made to confine the brown, corded neck that rose like a column above it.

Around his waist was wound a silken sash of brightest red; his trousers were of softest buckskin, fringed Indian fashion. But it was the size, the build and the reckless bearing of him that would attract attention. Standing with lifted chin there on top of the ridge, with the wind whistling shrilly past him, he was blood-brother to the rough outdoors about him, as big, as free, ay, and as lawless. His grace and elegance of form, so rare in a big man, Gaston had from his French mother, and his huge-boned viking's body had come to him from a giant Norse sire. Withal he was an American, born and reared, and some of his reputation for lawlessness had been made at the expense of men who questioned his nationality.

It was his first sight of Havens Falls. As he leaned forward against the ski-straps, peering down at the single street of the settlement, his bright blue eyes snapped with excitement and a boyish grin of reckless anticipation creased his young, bronzed face.

"There she is, Tom Pine! There's our town!" he cried. "Stores, sidewalks, houses, and men and—women!"

To the world in general, and to the little clump of buildings below in particular, he threw a careless kiss.

"Men and women, Tom Pine. Strong men to fight with; pretty women to laugh with. What more can a man ask Life to give him?"

Tom Pine, grizzled of hair, short of stature, but uncannily broad of shoulder and long of arm, drew himself up beside his young partner, carefully belting his mackinaw against the morning wind. In years it

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was obvious that Tom Pine was twice the age of Gaston, but the twinkle in his bright, outdoor eyes told that at heart he was just as young.

THE settlement lay at their feet in its snug site on a bend in the La Croix River. From where they stood they could look down upon each building in the place and tell by its appearance for what each one stood. Most of the buildings were gathered together at the foot of the ridge, directly below where they stood. There stood the post-office, the hotel, stores and dwelling-houses. Farther down there was a gap on the street, and at its lower end, running down to the river front, the street was builded solid on both sides; each building obviously was a saloon —or worse. Havens Falls was new, but already it had established standards, distinctions.

"Yep—a town," agreed Tom Pine curtly. "See how they keep the black sheep and the white separate. That's towns; that's civilization. I don't like towns, Gaston Olaf. I don't feel safe in 'em. In towns you got to sleep in rooms, with four walls around you, and a roof close above you to shut out the sky. People settle down in towns. Gaston Olaf, I'm always afraid that you 'n' me'll go to a town some time and—settle down!"

Gaston's laugh, a rollicking, hair-trigger laugh, rang out over the bare ridge.

"Towns are good places to come to once in a while, Tom Pine," said he. "Have we ever stayed in a town long enough to hurt us?"

"Not yet. I admit you that, Gaston Olaf. And I ain't saying towns ain't got their uses, to have a time in, and buy chuck and cartridges in. And I ain't saying we wasn't due for a little trip after being in camp six solid months to prove up those timber claims, which is too long for any man living to stay in one spot. But"—he shook his head slowly—"I don't like the feel of this trip for sour apples. I got a feeling, Gaston Olaf. I'm afraid something's going to happen here."

Gaston Olaf, as Tom Pine addressed him, looked reproachfully at his companion.

"Tom Pine, how long have we been partners?" he demanded.

"Years," Tom nodded. "Go on; I'm listening."

"And did you ever know me to go to a town without making something happen?"

"Oh, that. Of course. Man's got to kick up his hind heels a little when he hits a town. But this—this ain't that, Gaston Olaf; no, it ain't."

"Not that? Hah! I've got it, Tom Pine. It's because of the word this man Taggart sent us—word there was good money here for us any time we wanted to work. And you're afraid we'll take a job."

"No. 'Tain't that, either. I ain't scared of work, once in a while; you know that, Gaston Olaf. This—this is a reg'lar old Indian feeling, Gaston Olaf. I got a feeling that something different is going to happen here: I don't know what, but—something different."

" 'Something different'! " Gaston had settled his feet into the straps for the run down the hill. "Let's hope so, Tom Pine. Let's hope and pray you're a good prophet. That's what we're looking for—something different. That's what makes life worth living. So come on; let's see—Hello!"

From the lower end of the street came floating up to them the echoes of a drunken roar. Half a dozen men had come tumbling out of one of the saloons, laughing, singing, cursing, hallooing wildly. Locking arms they came surging up the street, announcing loudly that they were bad men, and spread themselves in a rude semicircle before the door of the post-office, directly below where Gaston and Tom Pine stood.

Gaston's smile of anticipation grew broader, his eyes brighter.

"Strong men to fight with, Tom Pine," he said with a wink.

"Yes; and pretty women to—look at the pups!"

Out of the post-office came a woman. Even from the top of the ridge Gaston could see that she was small, that she was young and trig and neat, and that she tripped lightly down the snow-covered steps on tiny feet.

Many things happened in the next few seconds. The girl turned to go her way, and five of the men, holding hands, barred her progress. The sixth, a big man in a flaming red shirt, stepped forward and attempted to take the girl by the arm.

Other things happened instantly upon this. As the girl shrank back a smallish, stockily built man ran bareheaded out of a

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store across the street, fought his way through the crowd and hurled himself upon the girl's tormentor. The man in the red shirt gave a bellow of rage as the small man staggered him with a blow on the jaw. For a moment, so determined was he, it seemed that the newcomer would triumph. Then the gang bore him down. From the hotel now came flying the splendid figure of a young girl, whose size and blondness shouted her Scandinavian breed even from afar.

The big man had slipped an arm about his victim. The crack of the blond girl's hand on his cheek caused him to relinquish his hold with one hand and knock her into the street. Then he laughed and drew the small woman toward him. But Fate, busy, inevitable Fate, was sending intervention on wings of speed.

Gaston Olaf was half-way down the ridge. Never did Gaston fail in the spectacular. He had started the moment the big man caught the girl by the arm. The snow on the ridge was frozen and he came at express-train speed, silently, unsuspected by those below.

Deliberately he steered his course for a boulder near the foot of the hill. Using the boulder as a take-off, he leaped. Upward and outward he flew through the air, standing up taut and straight, arms stretched above his head, the air-splitting ski-jumper at his best.

His leap was well-timed. He landed squarely on the big man as he bent over to kiss the struggling girl and flattened him into the snow beneath his skis.

"One down!" sang Gaston.

His terrific momentum hurtled him on, head over heels, through the air, straight into the midst of the five men who had the small man down. Before they could move he struck them, a two-hundred-and-twenty-pound bullet of bone and gristle, flying at the rate of thirty miles an hour.

One instant the five were on their victim, like bears upon a fallen wildcat. The next the group of them had split, as if from an explosion, into five separate and distinct parts, each part flying energetically, but helpless in its own distinct and separate direction.

"Gangway, please, gangway!"

Tom Pine, coursing neatly in Gaston's tracks, found it inconvenient to check himself until he had taken a jump off the red-shirted man's prostrate form, and landed full weight on a pair of the men whom Gaston had knocked into the street.

Gaston and Tom Pine, snow-covered and torn, the skis broken to stumps on their feet, brought up sitting, side by side, in the snow. Solemnly they reached out; solemnly they shook hands.

"Tom Pine, my chapeau is off to you," said Gaston. "You are big medicine as a prophet. 'Something different,' you said. 'Something different' was right. Never—never have we hit a town in this fashion!"

But Tom Pine shook his head, mournfully studying the wrecks of his skis.

"I'm worried some more, Gaston Olaf," said he. "I believe in signs and, you see, we—broke our skis!"

CHAPTER II

A CHALLENGE

GASTON OLAF sprang to his feet with a laugh, kicking his feet loose from the useless stumps. He was happy; for the spectacular and dramatic were dear to the French half of his nature.

The little man who had come so gallantly and futilely to the girl's rescue lay still in the snow, with his left arm bent back in unpleasant fashion. Gaston gave him scarcely a glance. What was a man more or less! Men were plentiful. Men lying still after a fight were no novelty to Gaston. Smallish, bareheaded men—men who lived in towns and ran stores—must expect to get knocked out if they tried to interfere with boys when they were having their fun. But a woman, a young woman, and trig and neat, who tripped lightly on tiny feet, in distress!

Gaston swung around upon her, his most winning smile upon his lips, his lightest words upon the tip of his tongue. And as he faced her a sudden change came upon him.

The words did not come. The smile lost much of its assurance.

Gaston stood stock-still and stared. He removed his cap and bowed with the grace that he had from his French mother. But the words, the light, pleasant words, which hitherto always had risen to his tongue like a golden stream under the inspiration of a woman's eyes, were not forthcoming.

The girl was small, as he had judged from the top of the hill. To Gaston she seemed

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wonderfully small and delicate in those rough surroundings. Above her close-buttoned mackinaw her face seemed to Gaston to rise like a frail lily. She was deadly pale, and her wide-set eyes were filled with terror. Brown eyes they were, wonderful brown eyes. But at each side of her cheeks a tiny ridge of muscle showed how firmly set was her jaw, while her mouth was pursed in a firm line of determination. And, what made Gaston tongue-tied, she was not looking at him.

"Oh, you cowards!" she cried, and the five men, rising drunkenly to their feet out in the street, cowered under the lash of womanly scorn and anger in her voice. "You miserable specimens of manhood! Call yourselves men! Five of you on one man, and you struck him when he was down!"

The men in the street looked guiltily at the still figure in the snow and began to slink away.

"Yes, see what you've done now!" cried the girl. "Isn't it a fine, brave thing to have done! Brave, strong men! Aren't you proud of your work! I should think you would hang your heads in shame. Oh, you cowardly brutes! You may have killed him."

A laugh, bull-throated and unabashed, sounded behind her. The man on whom Gaston had jumped was on his feet, miraculously unhurt. He was a big man, tall and broad, but flabby and gross from dissipation.

"Fun, little girl, just fun!" he laughed. "Nobody killed; just put out of business for a minute, sweetheart. Boys will be boys. Now we're going to have our li'l kiss, and then the big bum who jumped me——"

"Yes?" said Gaston Olaf.

The big man stopped. Gaston Olaf was standing before him, his hands resting carelessly on his hips, his head thrown back, lips smiling, eyes happy. Gaston ever insisted that he was not an especially courageous man, for, as he explained, when a fight was in prospect, the berserk strain that he had from his Norse father always asserted itself. A glow of contentment spread over him, and strange, cheerful music hummed in his ears.

Red Shirt's face was convulsed with the sudden, unreasoning rage of the powerful brute, crossed and defied, and mad with the desire to destroy.

"You—you——"

His teeth gritted furiously as he lowered his bull-like head for the rush.

"My name," laughed Gaston happily, "is Gaston Olaf François Thorson. But I'm American; don't you forget that. I jumped on you. I rubbed your nose in the dirt. I am a better man than you are. You are a big bum! You are—" he searched his fairly full vocabulary for the phrase most hated along the river—"you are a high-banker and afraid of white water."

Red Shirt looked at him. The rush did not materialize. Gaston Olaf merely stood as he was, his hands on his hips, his lips smiling. But Red Shirt looked above and saw his eyes.

"You are going away from here in about two seconds," continued Gaston pleasantly. "You are going to take your ugly mug out of this young lady's sight. If you were fit to speak to her I would make you apologize. Now—get ready to hike!"

Red Shirt looked around. Men were coming out of near-by buildings. In the door of the post-office stood an old man, the postmaster, in G. A. R. blue, with a shotgun in his trembling hands. Red Shirt's lip lifted in a sneer.

"You're safe here, Mr. Gasbag Thorson," he growled. "I've heard of you. You play at being a bad man. But you wouldn't dast try this down at the other end of the street."

The devil flamed up in Gaston. Many men had played with his odd name. Few but had regretted it. Tom Pine saw by the play of cords in his neck how Gaston was holding himself in.

"Perhaps not," he said quietly enough. "Perhaps I would not dare to try it down there. But in case I do, who should I ask for, please?"

A grin of contempt split the other's evil face.

"My name is 'Red Shirt' Murphy," he snarled as he turned away. "Ask anybody in Jack MacCarthy's where I hang out."

"Thank you, Mr. Red Shirt Murphy. We shall see. And now—travel!"

GASTON OLAF bowed mockingly as Red Shirt slouched away, and swung around again to speak to the girl. As a matter of course he knew that he had performed a gallant and striking action; that for the time being he was a heroic

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figure. He had played the rôle of Boss Man often in his varied career, and he knew full well the light in woman's eyes that is the hero's due. Therefore he was shocked when he turned around and found himself still apparently forgotten.

The girl was down on her knees in the snow beside the man in the street. She had lifted his head and was holding it up in the hollow of her arm, while with a tiny handkerchief she wiped the blood from the cruelly beaten face.

The terror of the moment before, when she had escaped from the brutal Murphy, the relief that had come with Gaston's arrival, the rage that had pinched her mouth as she scolded, all were wiped clean from her face, leaving no trace. In their place had come a look of tenderness, alarm, solicitude, and at the sight of it Gaston Olaf thrilled in a manner that had never come to him in a life full of thrills. This was something new, and he suddenly hungered for something—he knew not what—which his hard life had denied him. Jealousy shot instinctively into his soul as he looked down at her, the instinctive jealousy of the strong male beholding feminine tenderness lavished on another man. And instinctively he fought it back in shame, as a feeling too small, too unsportsmanlike to have room in his nature. Nevertheless, the feeling had been there and it left its mark.

"Oh, the brutes, the brutes! I believe they've killed him!" the girl was sobbing. "Mr. Hale, Dick! He doesn't move. Oh, Hulda, Hulda! Run and tell your mother—quick! She'll know what to do. And somebody get Dr. Sanders."

The yellow-haired Amazon had risen from the snow, recovered her dented frying-pan, and stood, arms akimbo, looking down at girl and man, undisturbed, unhurried by the scene.

"No; he en't dead, Miss Havens," she said quietly. "He err yoost knock' out. I seen lots o' dem fool man like dat. Dey're alvays fighting, deh big fools. Here come my mooder now. I go tell deh doctor."

Out of the hotel whence Hulda had come—a frame building bearing a sign "Olson's Hotel"—came waddling a smiling old woman as broad as Hulda was tall, as white of hair as Hulda was yellow.

"Good heavens! It's Mester Hale!" she cried as she bustled up. "And you, Miss Havens! You shouldn't do dat. You got blood on your vaist, and you catch cold on your lags if you don't gat up right dis minute. Hare, you big man." She nodded to Gaston as if he were only a big boy. "And you, liddle man." She indicated Tom Pine. "Vat you standing dare for? You pick him up and carry him in. We tak' care of him, oll right, Miss Havens. I tenk his arm err brok', oll right."

As she talked she drew the girl up from the snow and waved a commanding hand to Gaston and Tom Pine. Gaston pushed Tom away and, stooping low, thrust his long arms through the snow beneath the prostrate form. Then he stood up, bearing the weight of the sturdily built man on his arms, as a woman might bear a child.

"Where to, mother?" he said. "You're the Boss Man around here. Why didn't you come out in the first place? One look at that gang and you'd saved this lad rough handling."

Mrs. Olson's broad face grew broader still in a grin of delight; but Gaston saw that the girl whom the women called Miss Havens only held up the little man's broken arm.

"Yass, yass. It's good to have strong men around some time," said Mrs. Olson. "Come now; follow me."

She led the way into the hotel, to a comfortably fitted room on the second floor. The movement hastened Hale's returning consciousness and as Gaston moved toward the bed he opened his eyes. No groan came from his lips, though the broken bones in his arm grated as they laid him down. He looked quietly around, noted that Miss Havens stood unharmed in the doorway, tried to move his arm, and couldn't, then tightly pressed his lips together and lay without a word staring up at the ceiling, a world of patience in his genial, rounded face, waiting for the doctor.

The doctor arrived immediately, taking the stairs two at a time.

"What ho, Dick Hale! What 'a' they been doing to you, young fellow?" he shouted as he came bustling in, a thin, spectacled, Vandyke-bearded man with a wildly colored waistcoat and a merry twinkle in his eye. His eyes fell upon Gaston. "What ho! You're the Flying Man, eh? Dropped from the skies on top of Red Shirt Murphy. Heard about it. Given a night's sleep to have seen it. Something new, absolutely."

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He was throwing off gloves, cap and overcoat.

"Rough-handled you, eh, old dog?" he continued, taking up Hale's arm. "H'm, good enough. Simple fracture. Have you hale, Hale, in a hurry. Mrs. Olson, get some whisky. No, stop; I forgot. Hale doesn't use the vile stuff. I'll give him something else. But you can get me some nice, clean clothes, Mrs. Olson. Hulda—magnificent white and gold Norse Valkyrie that you are—you run down-stairs and get hot water. Miss Havens, I believe I'd step out of the room for a few minutes. H'm. Put your big arm under his back there, Mister. That's right. Now you can go, too, Big Man; too big for a sick-room. See you later, I hope. Like to talk to you. S'long."

"Hold on," groaned Hale suddenly, as Gaston moved away. "Come to my dance tonight. Store across street. My arm—be a man short. Take my place. Coming?"

"Sure," replied Gaston and went out.

Tom Pine was waiting anxiously as Gaston stepped out of the hotel.

"Gaston—Gaston Olaf," he said tremulously, "let's travel. The signs are getting thicker. There you was, Gaston Olaf, doing woman's work with a woman to boss you. 'Pick him up,' sez the woman, and you picked him up. 'Carry him in,' she sez, and you carried. Tamed like, just like men who live in towns have got to do—a woman to boss you! Gaston—Gaston Olaf, let's hit the trail."

Gaston shook his head. He did not laugh; a bad sign. Tom Pine looked wistfully back toward the free, unhoused wilderness whence they had come.

"Gaston Olaf—look at her!" He waved his hand toward the forest that ringed the town around. "That's the place for us, boy. No women out there. Look! We can hit that trail that runs round the shoulder of the hogback yonder. Once we're t'other side of the hill, we're shet of this town; we can streak it for the bush; we're safe. Come on, Gaston Olaf. I had the Indian feeling about this place when we started for it, and what's happened since we been here, had made me see that the signs read true. Let's sneak, Gaston Olaf; let's sneak before it's too late."

Gaston shook his head, smiling tolerantly.

"What about this Red Shirt man?" he asked.

Tom Pine nodded regretfully.

"That's so. We ought to clean him up before we go. Sure."

"What about this Taggart man who wants to see us?"

"Well, let's see him and get it over with."

"And—and——"

Gaston stopped abruptly and whirled around at the sound of a light footfall behind him.

Tom Pine groaned.

"Too late," he murmured under his breath.

Miss Havens had come out of the hotel and was holding her hand out to Gaston Olaf.

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL WITH THE BROWN EYES

"I DON'T want you to think because I'm tardy in saying 'thanks' that I'm not grateful to you, Mr. Thorson," she said. "I was so concerned about poor Mr. Hale that I forgot everything else. I appreciate very much what you did."

She halted. For the first time she was looking at him comprehensively, and few women could look upon Gaston Olaf as he stood then, a master woodsman, hardened and tough, yet with something winningly boylike about him, without pausing in appreciation. And Miss Havens, from the crown of dark hair on her head to her tiny feet, was as much a woman as Gaston was a man.

Gaston took the proffered hand timidly. It lay for a second, small and white, in his huge bronze paw, he scarcely daring to touch it for fear of crushing it. Then it was gone, but the touch of it remained for long after.

For a moment they stood silent, a study in contrasts, the man as hard, rugged, careless as any pine in the forest, the girl delicately feminine, a creature of softness, tenderness. And the morning sun flickered in their eyes, and they were young.

"I want to thank you for what you did," she concluded a little lamely. "I—I feel under obligation to you."

Gaston Olaf's tongue had loosened. His gay, boyish laughter rang promptly upon her words.

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"You feel under obligation to me, Miss Havens? No, no, no! The truth must out. I'm the one who is under obligation to you. You do not understand how that is? I will explain. My partner, Tom Pine—the small, tough-looking man there—and myself have been in the bush for six solid months. Six months, Miss Havens, one hundred and eighty days! Not in a camp where there are other men, where things may happen. No; we have been alone, by ourselves, in our two little cabins on a couple of timber claims we are proving up over on Otter Creek. There we have stayed, six months, with the trees for company by day, the wolves, stars, bobcats, by night. Good enough company, too, Miss Havens, for six months. But no longer.

"Six months is the limit. Then a man begins to yearn for his own. He wants to see other men, talk to them—see women, if he is lucky. Tom Pine and I come to Havens Falls. We want to see other people. We need to have something happen or we'll bust. We stand up there on the ridge and look down. We wonder if anything will happen in Havens Falls. Does it?

"Miss Havens, as we're standing up there, those boys begin to get impolite to you. What more could we wish? Tom Pine and I, we slide down and bump right into excitement—fine, juicy excitement—and now—now I have the privilege of meeting and talking with you. 'Obligations!' Miss Havens, I must thank you for the treat that you have given a poor, lonely man from the woods."

He laughed as he completed his swiftly uttered speech, and the infectious gaiety and youth of his merriment caught her up and she laughed with him.

"You look at it in a strange way," she said. "I never fancied any one would take that point of view."

"Exactly. There is a difference in our points of view. You live in town; I live in the woods. Men get queer ideas in the woods. For instance, they think that towns are good places to avoid, except when in need of provisions."

"That's right," interjected Tom Pine. "They are!"

Again Gaston laughed and again the girl joined in.

"You see, Miss Havens? Tom Pine there is a regular old wood-tick. He's actually afraid when he is in town, afraid something terrible will happen."

"That's right." Tom Pine's voice was grimmer than ever. "Towns is where they does happen."

"For instance, when we came here he was afraid that the worst thing in the world would happen to us."

"In Havens Falls?" she said. "Well, it *is* getting to be a very rough town."

"Oh, no, no, no, Miss Havens! It wasn't anything like that that Tom Pine was afraid of."

"What was it, then?"

"Guess."

"No. I'd never guess. I'm afraid our points of view are too different."

Gaston's face grew deep with mock gravity.

"He was afraid," he said slowly, solemnly, "he was afraid that we might settle down here and *stay!*"

Her laughter, to Gaston, rang out like the tinkling of a fine silver bell.

"Oh dear! As terrible as that? And you—do you share Mr. Pine's fears?"

Gaston did not reply at once. He looked around him at the squat houses, the frame stores, the sidewalks, at the river and the timber beyond, and his eyes came back to the girl's.

"I am a roamer, Miss Havens," said he. "I've got the restless feet that won't let a man stop long enough in any one place to get rooted. I've never stayed in any town I've been in any longer than I could help." Again he looked around. "But this—seems to be different," he said. "I suppose a man has to settle down some time. Maybe—I don't know—maybe Tom Pine is right."

With a laugh he pointed out into the street where the broken stumps of his skis were sticking in the snow.

"You see, Miss Havens, I broke my skis here."

"But I suppose you can make new ones?" she said.

"You bet!" snapped Tom Pine. "I'm the best ski-maker in this country."

"A man can make skis, or do anything else, if he really wants to," said Gaston.

"Can he?" she said, with a glance at the lower end of the street. "Then I wish I were a man. I'd make Havens Falls fit for decent people to live in."

She began to move away toward a

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substantial frame house in a fenced yard beyond the post-office.

"Here is poor Mr. Hale," she said, pausing. "He's just completed his store building and is to give a dance this evening to celebrate it, and here they disable him."

"Boys will be boys, Miss Havens. Especially in a settlement that's still got the bark on."

"Of course. But it isn't necessary for them to be such utter brutes as this last gang of outsiders has shown themselves to be."

"Oh." Gaston's eyes widened. "Outsiders, are they? And there's going to be a dance in the new store tonight? Oh, ho! Miss Havens, are you going to grace the gay and festive occasion with your presence?"

"I am going to be there, yes," she laughed. Then over her shoulder she asked, "Why?"

"Because," said Gaston seriously, "that being the case I have got to get a shave, and a boiled shirt, and some new shoes, and—dress up."

"You're coming, too?"

"Hale just invited me. I am."

She paused a distance away and looked at him.

"You might," she said merrily, "get a shave, but please—please don't dress up!"

Gaston scratched his chin dubiously as he watched her go.

"What did she mean by that, d'you s'pose, Tom?"

But Tom Pine deigned not to reply; only spat disgustedly into the snow.

"Now you've done it, Gaston Olaf," he grumbled. "You always was a fool for hunting trouble."

CHAPTER IV

THE TAMING OF RED SHIRT

"WHAT ho, gents! Looking over our fair young village?" The irrepressible doctor was beaming on them from the doorway. "Take a good look at her. You see before you the peerless Queen City of the great North Woods—in embryo. Small and sordid to look upon now, gents, but, I pray you, let your imagination soar. See, instead of the crude board and log shanties, a street of brick and stone. See, instead of saloons, honky-tonks and gambling-houses —schools, churches, banks, and—millinery shops. Instead of a couple of hundred inhabitants, see thousands; instead of—h'm, h'm! Rather hard on the imagination, seeing so much on a dry stomach. If you'll step across the street to my palatial office I'll hurl a shot of hooch into you that I'll guarantee won't give you the snakes under twenty drinks. Come along. I pine for your ruffianly company."

He led the way to a two-room frame building opposite. The first room was fitted out as a doctor's office, cleanly, pleasant, severe; but the room behind, whither he ushered Gaston and Tom Pine, betrayed the doctor's true character.

A bow-legged bulldog leaped truculently from a cot-bed to welcome them. In reprimand the doctor picked up a boxing-glove from a chair and smote the dog across the nose. The walls of the room were hung with guns, fishing-rods, boxing pictures, deer-heads and mounted fish. Books lay scattered about promiscuously, and the reek of tobacco smoke hung thick over all.

"Now then, Big Fellow," said the doctor briskly, when the drinks had been poured and consumed, "do you do those long-distance jumps on to a bad man's cocoa as a regular thing, or was this merely a special occasion? Sing me the saga of what happened out there in front of the post-office. I try not to miss anything as good as that, but Fate was ag'in' me this time. I didn't see a thing."

"No," said Gaston, "you will answer my questions first: Who is the young lady, Miss Havens?"

The doctor bowed.

"'Young lady' is right. Miss Havens is—you've heard of old 'Lone Camp' Havens? Yep? He was the old-timer who cruised this country first of all. Made this settlement. Tried to get hold of the timber around. Did get hold of some. LaCroix Logging Company froze him out of most of it. When he died he left a few houses, a few acres of town-site along the river here, and one good bunch of white pine up the river, ten, twelve miles away, on Loon Lake. Well, Miss Havens is the old man's daughter. Away at school when the old gent died. Came back. Settled down. LaCroix Company tried to buy her out for about four cents on the dollar's worth. She wouldn't sell. There you are. Angel of the settlement; you know what I mean."

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Gaston nodded.

"Do you know of a man named Taggart?"

"LaCroix Logging Company — that's Taggart—'Devil Dave' Taggart. Office down by his mill on the river!"

"And Red Shirt Murphy?"

The doctor spat.

"That big bum! Jail-rat, I should judge. Came up with a gang about a week ago. Going to a new camp up the river. All outsiders. All got on a drunk. Been ripping the shirt off the back of the town ever since they've been here. Made a bet he'd kiss Miss Havens before he left town. Bah!"

Gaston was on his feet.

"Where's Jack MacCarthy's place?" he asked quietly.

The doctor rose also.

"Down the street; the biggest place here," he said, puzzled. "That's where Murphy hangs out."

"So long," said Gaston as he started out.

"Oh, no," said the doctor. "I'm coming, too."

With a song on his lips Gaston hurried down the street to the long frame building bearing the sign: "Jack MacCarthy's Saloon." Still humming, he entered the barroom, which was well filled. He walked straight up to the bar and threw up a dollar.

"A drink of liquor," he said loudly, "and be sure it isn't out of the bottle that you give that high-banker, Mr. Red Shirt Murphy."

FOR a space of seconds the room was still. Then from the end of the bar came a throaty bellow.

"You come for it, did you, Mr. Gasbag Thorson?" growled Murphy, as he stepped forth from his crowd and threw off his mackinaw. "All right; you're going to get what you come after."

Gaston turned, a glassful of fiery liquor in his hand.

"Why, there's the high-banker now," he laughed. "Here, Mr. Murphy, have a drink," and he hurled the liquor straight into Murphy's lowering face.

Turmoil broke loose. Half a dozen men leaped toward him.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Dr. Sander's bantering voice rose above the noise. "Fair play, fair play! We do not conduct affairs between gentlemen in this manner." He advanced from the doorway to the center of the room. "The difficulty lies between these two gentlemen; nobody else has any share in it. Mr. MacCarthy, I hope you agree?"

Behind the bar the puff-faced MacCarthy looked Gaston over and nodded.

"The doc's right. It's the two av 'em for it. Clear the floor, the rest of you there! Give 'em all the room they want."

"I thank you, Mr. MacCarthy." The doctor bowed lightly and produced a split-second watch. "The fight will be conducted regularly, three-minute rounds, one-minute intervals. Anything goes but knives, axes, guns, and other ungentlemanly impedimenta. Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"Ready!" laughed Gaston; he was leaning carelessly with his back against the bar.

"Ready!" growled Murphy.

"Time!" cried the doctor, and with the word Murphy rushed.

Gaston did not move until Murphy was within striking distance; then only the leap of the wildcat would have matched him for swiftness, the might of a bear for power.

He caught Murphy about the middle. In a fury he heaved him up over his head and let him fall. Then he stepped back to the bar.

Murphy strove to rise. A groan escaped his lips and he collapsed. The doctor stepped forward and bent over him. A moment later he looked up.

"The fight is over, gentlemen, and Mr. Thorson wins," he said. "Some of you fellows who're friends of Murphy pick him up. We've got to put him to bed; his collar-bone's broken."

"The right one, isn't it, doc?" asked Gaston.

"Yes. Snapped clean."

Gaston looked around at the hard eyes that were regarding him truculently.

"It was his right arm that Murphy put around Miss Havens," he said. "Anybody else want to give me a chance to show that trick?"

Even the doctor stared.

"H'm, h'm! I see. Pretty rough work, Big Man. Little disappointed myself. Hoped we'd see a nice little mill with the maulies. Like to have you show me that throw, though, later on."

"I will show it now if any of Mr.

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Murphy's friends want revenge," said Gaston. "What! Nobody? All right; think it over. Any time any of you change your minds you can find me. I will always be ready to oblige."

With Tom Pine following, he walked out, paying no more attention to the glowering crowd than if it was so much furniture.

"Cripes, Gaston Olaf!" gasped Tom Pine when they were out in the street. "That was the fiercest I ever see you tackle a man yet. I never see you mad yet—don't know if you really can get mad like other folks—but if I didn't know you so well, I'd say you was mad when you took hold of him."

Gaston shook his head seriously.

"Tom Pine," said he, "I sort of take to this settlement. I like the people here. I like the way things happen. We've had excitement. 'Something different.' Life has been worth living every second since we came into town. I don't know but what we'll make camp and stay a while."

"That ain't news to me, Gaston Olaf. I knowed we was going to do that for some time."

"Well, Tom Pine, I'm a peace-loving man."

Tom Pine made queer noises in his throat, indicating that he was suppressing a chuckle.

"I am," insisted Gaston. "I don't like to keep fighting all the time."

"Not all the time; I admit you that, Gaston Olaf. Unless a man thinks out loud that he's as good a man as you are, you don't want to fight him; I'll admit you that."

"There's a whole lot of hard men in this settlement; you can see that," continued Gaston. "Well, I don't want to be fighting 'em all. And I don't think after this I'll have to, eh, Tom Pine?"

"Perhaps." Tom Pine looked at his partner out of the corner of one eye. "And was that why you was so rough with this Murphy—was that the whole reason why?"

Gaston looked dreamily up the street.

"He was like a baby in my hands, wasn't he, Tom Pine?" he said vaguely. "Just like a little toy. I felt as if I exploded when I laid hands on him. His arm curved out to get me, and I saw him just as we saw him first when he was trying to take hold of the girl, back there at the foot of the hill. I heaved up on him. Tom Pine, I swear I didn't feel his weight at all. He was nothing. I let him fall. His neck or his shoulder blade, I didn't care. The dirty, drunken bum! He dared to try to kiss that girl!"

"He'll have it in for you," said Tom dryly. "The others may be scared off; he'll remember. He's kind of a hard one. You can see it in his eye."

Gaston came out of his mood of abstraction with a start.

"What? Oh, yes, sure. But he won't be fit for rough work for some time. Now, let's look up this Taggart."

As they looked around, a soft-footed young Indian came like a shadow out of MacCarthy's place, slipped past them and glided away toward the mill buildings on the water-front.

"Hello! Look at that. That's where we want to go, too."

The Indian had slipped swiftly into a small log building standing by itself on the river-bank and bearing a sign: "LaCroix Logging Company, Office."

Save that it was more carefully and strongly put together, the office building might have been a cabin in the woods. Its walls were made of thick logs, carefully hewed and fitted. Four small windows, one in each wall, served to let in the light, and in the heavy timber door a tiny pane of glass, high up, looked down the street of the settlement like a single vigilant eye.

Tom Pine cocked his head shrewdly as they approached and surveyed the building.

"Gaston Olaf," he said quizzically, "d'you know what that looks like to me? Looks like a little fort. Look how it stands right out there by itself on the river. Two men with Winchesters and plenty of cartridges could stand off this whole settlement if they had nerve. You can tell a man by his shanty, Gaston Olaf, as you know; but I'll be shot if I can figger the breed of the guy who dens up here."

The door opened slightly as they stood there, the Indian slipped out, and the door closed swiftly behind him.

"How, Charley?" greeted Gaston. "Man named Taggart camping here?"

"Mebbe so," grunted the Indian and passed by without looking up.

"Come on," said Gaston, "we can make a good Injun out o' him later on," and he pushed open the door.

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CHAPTER V

DEVIL DAVE TAGGART

A THIN voice greeted them promptly. "If you're coming in, come in and close the door."

Gaston looked in the direction from whence came the voice and in a poorly lighted corner of the poorly lighted room made out a skull-capped head bent over a rude desk.

"You wish to see——"

The voice was almost servile. The head did not lift itself at their entrance. Its owner was busy with pencil and paper.

"A man named Taggart," replied Gaston.

"Yes, yes. Exactly. And you wish to see Mr. Taggart about——"

Still the skull-cap stared Gaston in the face.

Gaston bridled a little. He was not accustomed to the usages of the business world, nor to having underlings stop and question him when he sought to see any man, no matter what his position. For a moment he stood staring at the skull-cap, then his voice rattled the windows.

"I want to kiss him!" he roared. "What did you s'pose I wanted of him?"

The skull-cap went up; the pencil ceased scribbling. Gaston saw a large, roughly bearded face standing out of the half-light. A pair of tiny eyes were boring him through, and through the heavy mustache around the man's mouth he caught the gleam of two fang-like teeth. He saw now that the man's head was huge, that it was sunken down on a pair of painfully bowed shoulders.

The man, although seated cramped at a desk, seemed to grow as he looked at him. At first he had judged him a thin-chested indoor man. Now he saw that he was enormously thick through the body, and that for a moment the power of him seemed to fill the room.

"I am Taggart," said the man meekly, and collapsed into his former position.

Gaston blinked. He felt that his first impression must have been right; the man was small and weedy. He wore a long frock-coat. No one but an indoor man would wear such a coat.

"My name is Thorson," said Gaston.

"Yes, yes." The man did not look up. "I have heard of you. I have heard of some of your—your playful little ways, let us say. I have often thought that we could be useful to each other. I have things to be done, sometimes, that require men of your caliber—men who are untamed, without respect for the law, and——"

He looked up suddenly, and again Gaston felt the blinding power of those half-hid eyes.

"You have considerable reputation for roughness, Mr. Thorson."

"Perhaps," replied Gaston. "What of it?"

Taggart coughed feebly.

"I have taken the trouble," he said in his thinnest voice, "to assure myself that your reputation is, in this respect, based on fact."

Again he coughed, pushing his chair back weakly.

"You see, I am no child myself," he whined, and stood up, a red-gray bearded giant, in spite of his ministerial frock-coat.

For a few seconds he stood thus, a grotesquely huge, gnarled figure, filling his corner of the room, and then with a faint cough he subsided into his chair.

"Mr. Thorson," he resumed, "do you realize that this country about here is in danger of becoming too—too, shall we say too civilized for real, true men of the woods to live in? We are at sort of a crisis here. Settlers, towns, and even railroads threaten to come into the district. Men of the old kind will be driven out. The country will become as tame as a back yard unless the people who seek to make it so are—er—discouraged."

"Run 'em out," said Gaston carelessly. " 'Tisn't the first place where it's been done. Those fellows wouldn't leave any free woods if they had their way about it."

Taggart lifted his head and smiled.

"And does your partner——"

He nodded at Tom Pine.

"Same here," said Tom. "We're partners."

Taggart nodded.

"Well, then, gentlemen, we agree on that, as I knew we would, having taken the precaution to investigate your reputation for—er—for not being tame." His manner suddenly changed. "However, I am slightly disappointed in you, Mr. Thorson," he continued in his thin voice. "Brawling, fighting, frequenting saloons—such things are very distasteful to me."

Gaston took a sudden step forward.

"Mr. Taggart, with your nice black coat,

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you can keep that kind of talk behind your bristly old beard. I didn't come here to find out whether you liked my style or not. I don't care a hoot whether you do. And I'll let you know that that kind of talk doesn't go with me."

Taggart's teeth showed in a satisfied smile.

"Yes, yes. I understand. Youth, high spirits; yes, yes. Nevertheless, it is sinful, very sinful. And wasteful, wasteful of good material. Mr. Thorson, you have just seriously damaged one of my camp foremen, very seriously damaged him. In fact, from what I hear, he is for the time being a total loss."

"You've heard of that? Why, it just happened. Oh, that Indian——"

"Yes, yes. I—through my friends—I manage to hear of most things that happen in this settlement as immediately afterward as may be. I also know of how you arrived in town. I commend you for your action in saving Miss Havens from the—the rough humor of intoxicated men.

"It is distressing to think of the roughness and carelessness of some of the men about here, particularly of this crew which I am sending to my new camp. They are a rather rougher outfit than ordinary. I have no doubt that I shall have trouble finding a man who is man enough to get them out of town, get them into camp and start them working. They are rather hard to control. Yes, I doubt if there is a man to be found about here who is man enough for the task—now that Murphy is disabled."

Gaston's neck began to swell. This man was playing with him, taunting him, the cock o' the woods!

"Mr. Taggart," he said in his best manner, "if this Murphy was so valuable to you, you should have kept him wrapped up carefully, so a real man couldn't lay hands on him and bust him up."

Taggart wagged his head, smiling the smile that showed the two fang-like teeth.

"Perhaps in a wrestling match, Mr. Thorson, you were his master," he whined. "Boys' play, horse-play. But handling a crew that is on a spree, handling two dozen big, rough men, that's a different matter, very, very different, indeed."

"Do you mean to say that I—that I can't do it?"

Taggart wagged his head, still smiling.

The smile ate into Gaston's heart. It seemed to search out his very soul, to weigh him to the marrow of his bones, and to find him ridiculously, boyishly wanting. It seemed to him that this old man before him was chipping inches off his stature, was softening the metal of his manhood, was making him feel small. For the moment he forgot everything else; he even forgot the girl. This was the challenge; the primordial taunt which roused him as the lightning flash rouses thunder.

"Don't you think I'm man enough for your job?" he demanded.

"Oh, I don't say that, Mr. Thorson. I had not considered you as a possible successor to Murphy. No, no. This task—I had Murphy selected for it."

"And I broke Murphy like a boy, between my two bare hands," said Gaston. "Do you still say I can not do what he could?"

Taggart looked at him suddenly.

"Do you think you can?" he said in a fuller voice.

"That's the question." Gaston struck the desk. "Can I do it? Is it in me? Here are two dozen hard men—the hardest I've ever seen in the woods. They hate me because I broke their leader and gave them the dare—which they didn't take up. They're drinking, and they don't want to leave town. They would be ready to smash up any man who tried to take them to camp now. And there isn't probably one of them who wouldn't knife me if he had the chance.

"What will happen when they see that I'm the man who is going to yank them away from their whisky and put them in camp? What will they do? What will I do? That's the question. That's what draws me, Mr. Taggart. Not the chance of a job, but that. It's a challenge; it's a temptation to try, and—I'm strong against everything but that kind of temptation. You ask me: 'Do you think you can?' I reply, 'Give me the job.'"

The skull-cap went down over the desk.

"All right." The pencil was busy on the paper. "You may try. The camp is ready. Camp Nine, a new camp, eight miles up the river on— You don't know the country up there, do you?"

"Never been up there."

"Yes, yes, so I understood. This new camp is eight miles up the river—eight miles—on Thunder Lake. Ever hear of Thunder Lake? No; it's a small lake, eight

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miles away. It's Norway pine we're cutting up there; a small job; early drive. The camp is all ready, grub, tools and horses. All you have to do is to get the men up there—you'll find a working boss there; he'll put 'em to work. You're to get them up there and keep them at it. The sleighs are ready to haul the men out any time you wish to start. Your wages——"

"*Pff!* Do you think I do this for money—for money alone?"

"For what, then?"

"For the fun of doing it—for fun."

"Your wages will be a hundred dollars a month," said Taggart, adding dryly, "if you're able to come back and collect it. That's big wages for light work. The working boss at Camp Nine gets only eighty. That's just the figure that your job is worth, too. You will be paid the extra twenty dollars in order to make it to your interest to do one certain thing and do it well."

"What's that?"

"Keep your mouth shut. Keep it shut first, last and all the time! Keep it shut about Camp Nine. And if you absolutely have got to talk about Camp Nine, remember only this: it's on Thunder Lake and only eight miles away from the settlement; it's Norway pine that we're cutting, and there's only a small batch of it."

The skull-cap flew up and Taggart was smiling genially.

"To tell the truth, Mr. Thorson, I've heard a lot about you. I've often wanted to get you on my pay-roll. I—I often have wanted a man like you who is not—not softened by civilization, or bothered about laws, or any of that silly stuff; a man who makes his own laws. That's what I do, and I understand you do, too. Well, Thorson, you're a young man. I'm a powerful one. I've got a one-hand grip on this country around here, and I want to make it two-handed. A lot of small people are trying to keep me from doing it—dirty little squatters and settlers and so on. I am not a man of violence, Thorson. Conflict is distasteful to me. But you—ah, well, we shall see how you make out on your first task. But remember that the young man who makes himself David Taggart's fighting man will be one of the big men, one of the rich men of this country. Now, here is a list of the names of the men who are to go to Camp Nine. You can get sleighs—take two of them—any time you order them over at the company's barns. Can you start at once?"

"No," said Gaston, "I have decided to take in the dance here tonight first."

The skull-cap dropped again. Taggart shook his head.

"Ah, yes," he whined. "I have heard there is to be a dance. I do not approve of such frivolity. Harmless enough in itself, I have no doubt, but I fear it is only the stepping-stone to great sins and evils. You——"

"I will have the men in camp tomorrow morning," interrupted Gaston. "Is that good enough for you?"

The skull-cap nodded.

"And remember," came the whining voice, "Camp Nine is on Thunder Lake, eight miles out, and we're cutting Norway pine."

GASTON drew in a long, hungry breath as he stepped out into the bright light of day. He looked at Tom Pine. Tom Pine shivered.

"That's just the way I feel, too," laughed Gaston. "Whew! That man tired me more than a day and night on a rough trail. He's an old swamp auger if there ever was one. Bores right into you and sucks the steam out of you and grins a little to let you know that he knows just how small you feel."

"I need a drink," said Tom Pine. "Come on. That doctor's stuff'll be about the right medicine."

They found the doctor waiting for them in his office.

"What ho, busy gents! You fellows don't waste time, do you? Come into town on the jump; knock over one of our bad citizens; give a little first aid to the injured; take a drink; waltz out; break the bad citizen's collar-bone; and stroll down and call on 'Devil Dave' Taggart just as if nothing had happened. Boys, I like you. I like the clip you travel at. Let us retreat from the prying public eye and introduce into our systems a little of that justly celebrated poisoning, irritating, habit-forming drug called 'hooch'."

"We sure need it," admitted Tom Pine.

"Most people do after talking with Dave Taggart," chuckled the doctor as he led the way into the back room and produced the bottle. "See little Samson there?" He

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pointed to the big bulldog which came waddling to greet them. "Doesn't look like a party that anything would set back much, does he? Well, little Samson met Taggart one bright Sunday morning when they were both feeling fine, and Samson growled and showed his teeth. Taggart looked at him. Samson came home, tail between his legs, whining. Here's how, boys. And, say, talking about drinking, and women, that man Taggart—he's the champion. Sprees about once a month. Awful! What'd he do to you?"

Gaston replied merely that he had been engaged to take Murphy's crew out to camp.

"Glorious gobs of joy! When are you going to start 'em? Don't let me miss it, will you? Man, you're taking your life in your hands. Guess that doesn't bother you, though, eh? When does the riot take place?"

"After the dance tonight."

"H'm, h'm! The dance. I see. Well, I'd feel more confident that there was going to be a dance tonight if you'd told me that gang was going out before the dance."

"Why so?"

"Because—h'm, h'm—that bunch—they're talking—they're going to come and break it up."

Gaston smiled.

"Oh, that'll be all right," he said. "Say, Doc, let me use your razor."

CHAPTER VI

BROWN EYES CAN BE COLD

NEXT to a fight Gaston probably loved a dance above other things to be had in towns. Just as the shock of breast against breast in desperate battle woke within him the raging, tearing joy of the fighting man, so the strains of music, the sight of beaming eyes of young women, the sound of their laughter, the touch of their hands, stirred a strain in him which brought music to his laughing soul.

Then he relaxed. His eyes grew dreamy. He was an altogether different Gaston Olaf from the one who man-handled his fellow men on the slightest invitation.

He danced as might have been expected of him, with a lightness and grace that made his partner the envied of all women who beheld them. The woman who had Gaston Olaf for a partner counted herself fortunate; and Gaston did his best to dance with them all.

His reputation, his good looks, his ability as a dancer made him the hero of every dance he attended, and Gaston knew it. He knew what to expect as a matter of course when he entered a dance floor, and the bright, admiring looks from women's eyes were as light wine to him. Those looks never seriously turned his head, yet without them an evening to him would have been a failure.

Gaston Olaf went to the dance in Hale's new store in the mood that was customary to him in approaching a dance. He did not enter until a lull in the dancing, when the dancers were waiting expectantly. The crowd—perhaps a dozen women and girls and fewer men—looked up at him as he came in. They did not rush forward to greet him; they did not cry out his name; even the women did not smile! Gaston stopped. He saw Dr. Sanders chatting with Hulda; Hale, also, he saw. His eyes ran around the crowd and picked out Miss Havens. A little gasp of delight escaped Gaston at the sight of her. He had often dreamed of beautiful women beautifully arrayed, and now his dream had come true.

The gown that Rose wore was a simple white party gown, but to Gaston it was a garment of beauty. Her throat was bare and small and round. On her feet glistened tiny slippers. And she was laughing merrily and using her eyes playfully—but not for him.

At the sight of him she stopped laughing and bowed stiffly. Her warm brown eyes grew cold, and Gaston's gay manner had vanished. He stood looking at her fixedly. The two fiddlers on a platform at the far end of the room laid their bows on the strings. Gaston smiled suddenly and crossed the floor to her side.

"I see you are not as glad to see me as you were this morning," he said; "but won't you dance one dance—this one—with me, at least?"

She strove to be severe, but the splendid audacity, the bright blue eyes, the flaming youth of the man, brought the light of mischief to her eyes.

"You seem confident. Suppose this dance is taken?" she said.

"That means it isn't."

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"Why, how absurd! You don't know anything about it."

She looked up at him and laughed, a little nervously. He held out his arm. She looked at his eyes again.

"I tell you—" The music struck up—"Oh, all right."

She was in his arms. They were actually dancing together, and she was laughing and conscious that he danced very well.

"I'm merely doing it to avoid a scene," she twitted, with a mischievous toss of her head. "I've no doubt that you'd have been rude if I'd refused—after what I've heard about you."

"Dance!" he laughed. "Let us dance while we're dancing. I see that something is wrong; I see I'm not wanted here, but let's live in the meantime. Let's enjoy this dance if we never have another."

"I am not—I'm not accustomed to being treated like this."

"I am not accustomed to having girls refuse to dance with me."

"Oh, modest man!"

"I wouldn't be honest if I pretended to be."

"Are you always honest?"

"Always—except when it is amusing to be something else."

"Are you amusing yourself now?"

He waited some steps before replying.

"All my life I have lived to amuse myself," he whispered, his words blending with the scraping of the fiddles. "Amusement, excitement, thrills, fun! They have been all that have interested me. Never, never, until this morning have I thought that anything else would be worth while."

She laughed shortly.

"And then you reformed. I heard about you in MacCarthy's saloon."

The music stopped. Gaston deliberately led her to a corner where they were alone.

"Is that it? Is that why you were as warm and friendly as an icicle in your greeting?"

"I did not want to seem unfriendly in my greeting," she said bitterly. "I do not want to appear ungrateful for what you did this morning. I am grateful. I feel under obligation to you. But I am disappointed in hearing that you—that you—well, there is so much brawling, and fighting, and disorder here now that when a new man comes to town and begins——"

"I see. When he begins to take part in saloon fights——"

"Why in the world did you do it?" she blazed. "How can you do it? You are a man of intelligence; you're above the sort of men who do such things. Why did you do it?"

Gaston looked at her so steadily, so burningly that she shifted her gaze.

"Do you want me to tell you why I did it?" he asked.

"Yes. I'd like to hear an apparently intelligent man's reason for creating disorder."

"All right then." His blue eyes burned her, and she was conscious of something in the living, dancing depths of them that stirred her uncomfortably. "I hadn't thought of telling you, but now I will. Murphy dared to put his right arm around you. I picked a fight and broke his right collar-bone so he'd know that was a dangerous thing to do while I am around."

"How dared you?" she flared, but his eyes caught hers and held her.

He was too strong for her. She wilted and grew confused.

"I do not thank you for indulging in a barroom fight on my account," she said, looking away. "I—it disgusts me. I sincerely hope, if that is your kind—if you are going to add to the trouble we have had here—that you will not be stopping long in Havens Falls. And if you do, I hope you will not intrude yourself on the people who are trying to make the town decent and peaceable enough for decent people to live in."

SHE was gone, and Gaston was left alone, dumfounded. Hale, his arm in a sling, and his square, sober face genial in spite of its disfiguration, and Dr. Sanders came up to him. Hale held out his left hand.

"I'm much obliged for this morning, Thorson," he said quietly. "I'll remember that."

"Just been telling Hale about your job to get that gang out to camp," said Dr. Sanders. "He's kind of puzzled about it. Hale knows the country around here like a book; tramps all over it; says it's got a great future; iron in some of the ridges; brick-clay along the river; and a great farming country all around. But he doesn't know of any Thunder Lake."

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"But that doesn't say it isn't there," supplemented Hale. "Only, I've never ran across any lake with pine left on it within eight miles of here. Miss Havens has got a nice bunch of white pine up on Loon Lake, but that's twelve miles away, so it couldn't be that."

But the blood was pounding in Gaston's temples; his throat was dry with anger. Never in his life had any girl talked to him in this fashion. He scarcely heard what Hale and Sanders were saying. He didn't trouble to hear. She had humiliated him, the proud, the strong Gaston!

He tugged at his collar. What mattered it what Hale was saying? What had he to do with these town people?

He knew where he belonged; he would go there at once.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, bowing to Hale and Sanders. "I've got work waiting for me."

Near the door he stopped before Rose and made a low bow.

"Good-by, Miss Havens," he said. "The brutal, disorderly, barroom fighter now goes back to his own kind."

"Oh!" The little muscles tightened about her mouth, but her eyes were troubled. "I—I never said anything of the sort," she stammered.

But Gaston was on his way, striding down the street toward where the red lights, the riot and song, the rattle of pianos, the mad laugh of women, and all the forces of sin and disorder beckoned and threatened.

CHAPTER VII

A MAN'S-SIZE JOB

A BLIND man, provided his ears were normal, would not have had the slightest difficulty in realizing that something out of the common was brewing in Jack MacCarthy's saloon that night as Gaston Olaf came down the street. First, the other saloons in the row were strangely deserted for that time of the night; second, bartenders, gamblers and others, who were unable to leave their places of business, peered from shuttered doors or curtained windows in the direction of Jack's; third, Jack's place was packed with a crowd that was strangely silent.

The silence impressed Gaston. It was unnatural. At that time of night MacCarthy's should have been the abode of profane noises.

Gaston Olaf directed Tom Pine to hie him hence to the company's stables and order up the two sleighs, and moved silently up to Jack MacCarthy's door. Not a foot was moving inside, not a man was roaring. It was uncanny.

Gaston peered over the low green blinds. One of Murphy's companions of the morning, a crop-haired, broken-nosed man, was addressing the roomful of men. Gaston put his ear to the keyhole and listened.

"We can get that guy who put the bug on Red Shirt, too," the broken-nosed one was growling. "He's up there at the dance. Make 'em all sick of this burg at the same time. The orders is to clean those good people out so strong that they'll be ready to pack up and hike tomorrow. Well, we'll do a little personal job on the side. We'll get that big fresh guy at the same time."

"Get him good! I'll stomp his fresh face in! Gasbag Thorson! If I get a jab at him with my chiv, I'll let the gas out o' him all right!"

"All right, then. Now come on. We want to take 'em by surprise. 'Bout four of us'll 'tend to him while the rest beats up the rest of them——"

Gaston slipped in swiftly, closed the door behind him, shot the bolt to, and stood with his back against the door, regarding them with a look of contempt. The leader, who had been near the door, recoiled and drew back; the rest stared, open-mouthed.

Gaston, a sneering smile on his lips, took time to let his eyes single out each man in the throng. He saw that there were over twenty men present, and he judged rightly that here was the whole gang of Murphy's ruffians assembled. His sneer grew larger as he noted the faces of them. Whisky, dirt, disease, and worse had its mark upon all of them. Their scarred, bloated faces—some of them indubitably marked by jail—were at home in MacCarthy's; they would have been out of place out in the woods.

Gaston looked in vain for the bright, fearless eye, the free swing of the shoulders that marked the true woodsmen. Lumberjacks some of them were, undoubtedly; but not one there was who belonged in the woods.

Gaston shook his head. He had expected to vent his rage in a fight, but these men weren't worth the trouble.

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"Of all the low, miserable offscourings of hell, you are the worst I've ever seen," he said slowly. "How many jails and lodging-house saloons were combed to produce such a bunch of scums? You poor, dirty, whisky-soaked saloon sweep-outs! You low-down, rotten, sheriff-dodging, drink-cadging bunch of rats! The best you've got nerve to do is to shove a knife in some lad who's laid out stiff, and you—" his voice rose suddenly, like the clang of sharpened steel—"and you kid yourselves into talking about getting *me!*"

His eyes again roamed over them, a little flame of fury in them now, and lighted on the gang's leader. The leader was probably ten feet from Gaston. He shivered as Gaston's eyes found him. He wanted to sneak farther back, but those eyes held him. Gaston looked back at the crowd. The leader sighed audibly.

"Why, you cheap, city crooks!"

Like the flash of something elemental, his eyes still on the crowd, Gaston leaped forward. The gang leader squealed once. Then Gaston was back at the door, the leader with him, and his left hand was throttling the man blue in the face, while his eyes still held the crowd.

"If there was a sound man among you—" he flung the man aside without looking, as a busy terrier might fling a rat—"if you were anything but a bunch of yellow crooks you'd have had me down under your caulks five seconds after I entered this room."

The devils of wrath suddenly flamed in him, and he raged across the floor, up and down before them, like a tiger panting to leap upon its prey.

"You talk about going up and getting me. I've come after it. Come on. It's easy picking. You can't fight, but half of you've got knives. Come on. You've stuck men in the back before. Hop to it! One of you'd have a chance to sneak around on me sure. Grab hold. I wouldn't be able to kick the guts out of over half of you before you'd get me down. Do it now, and get it over with, for, by the Lord! if you ever try it after this and I find it out, I'll hunt the last man of you down and beat his brains out with his own leg.

"Last call. You'll never hold up your heads to me again if you don't get me now. You'll eat out of my hand. You'll do what I say or I'll put you in the hospital. What? Nothing doing?" He stepped back. "All right then. Get your turkeys together if you've got any; for I'm your new boss in place of Murphy, and you're going to start for camp right now!"

One man, and one only, questioned this last statement, a young man almost of Gaston's own size, with his youth all run to whisky-bloat, and the shifty eyes of a crook.

"We start for camp when we get —— good 'n' ready," he growled. "Ain't anybody going to hurry us."

Gaston whirled upon him and stood, head thrust forward, watching him for a moment between narrowed lids. The young man suddenly felt sorry that he had spoken, and sought to slink behind a companion.

"Come here, you," said Gaston sharply.

He did not speak again. His eyes bored the youth through, and his forefinger beckoned irresistibly. Sullenly the big fellow slouched forward, helpless from fright, yet defiant by right of the youth left in him.

"What'a yah want?" he snarled.

"I want to look at you. Come nearer."

The young man stood before him, an ox led to slaughter, his arms useless at his sides, his eyes dumbly pleading for mercy. The crew shuffled a little in sympathetic agony as Gaston's cold stare froze the young fellow into abject terror. Each instant they expected to see a flash of long arm, and hear the youth thud, like a stricken ox, on the floor.

Gaston did not strike him. He did worse. He removed the fellow's cap and tossed it away. He slapped his face. He took the victim by the jaw and thrust the head far back; he pushed with the heel of his hand on the man's nose until he seemed about to rub it off his face. He rubbed his ears, stabbed his fingers lightly against his eyes, rocked his head with light, contemptuous cuffs. It was cruel man-breaking, carried to the final degree of subtle brutality, and it did its work.

"Hit me!" blubbered the fellow piteously. "Hit me, and have it over with."

For reply Gaston thrust him back into the crowd, wiped his fingers carefully on his handkerchief, and with a look of disgust, tossed the handkerchief away.

"Is there any one else who thinks he isn't going to start for camp right now?" he asked coldly.

It was a superfluous question. They would have gone anywhere, done anything,

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anything to be rid for the moment of the pressure of his cruel will. A grunt of relief escaped from several as the sleighs pulled up outside and a teamster, whip in hand, and heavily muffled, entered.

"All right, boss; ready to start whenever you are," he said. "Let's get going soon's we can; the horses can't stand long in this weather."

Gaston promptly began to call out the names on the list Taggart had given him. At each name a man sullenly went into the back room, took his bag or satchel from the pile stored there, and hurried out to the sleighs. Two failed to respond, being helpless from liquor.

"Load them," commanded Gaston. "One in each sleigh."

When the sleighs were loaded, each with its freight of a dozen cowed or dead-drunk men, he leaped up beside Tom Pine on the driver's seat of the second sleigh.

"Just a minute, Thorson." Dr. Sanders, who had been watching the events in MacCarthy's with a grin on his face, stepped up and spoke in a low voice. "If I were you I'd go back to the dance—just for a minute anyway."

"Why?"

"Somebody wants to see you before you go."

Gaston's laughter was as cold as the Winter night.

"No, thanks. I'm one of the toughs. I don't belong up there. Let 'em go, driver."

"Whoa! Pull 'em up a second!" The doctor was very much in earnest. "Thorson, do you know anything about the man you're working for?"

"You bet; he's a man with hair on. He doesn't want to make a Sunday-school out of the woods. Look out, Doc—they'll step on you."

The doctor sprang back as the prancing team moved forward.

"Thorson," he shouted as the sleigh swept past, "I'll bet you the drinks that some day you'll be sorry for being such an impetuous fool."

CHAPTER VIII

A CROOKED TRAIL

GASTON heard, and laughed loudly in reply.

"Let 'em go, driver!" he commanded. "Get out of town as quick as they'll travel. Shake 'em up. Plenty of time to walk 'em when we're out on the road, away from the lights."

"Giddap, boys! Steady—steadyee! Giddap—git out of there!"

The big logging-teams, ramping with high feeding and leisure, nipped by the cold, and hitched to loads that were playthings to them, needed no second urging. With smoking nostrils and heads well down they tore down the street for the road up the river.

Maudlin screams of rage, laughter, invitation and contempt came from the red-light places as the two sleigh-loads pulled past. A few of the men answered back drunkenly; a medley of curses and laughter, flaming lights, open doors. Then they were past.

The shouting died down abruptly. They were on the river road, speeding into the silent darkness of a tamarack swamp, and the lights and noise were suddenly left behind.

Gaston breathed a great sigh of relief as he cast a look upward at the starlit sky, which showed above the knife-like slit in the tamaracks.

"Well, Tom Pine, we didn't stay long in that town," he laughed.

"Not long enough to hurt us if we're through with it now," admitted Tom Pine.

"Through with it?" A tiny, troubling thought shot through Gaston's mind. Then he laughed it away. "Of course we're through with it; this is the game for us. Lay low there, you bums! Don't try any flopping out of the sleigh on me. Any man tries to get away, I'll ride him into camp at the end of a chain behind the sleigh."

He glowed; he laughed. Life was at its fierce floodtide for him for the time being. No time for regrets, for introspection, for thoughts of what might have been. What had he to do with long-lashed brown eyes, with scornful little mouths, with tiny, tripping feet? He was playing the stern old "man game," which he was bred to play, and the game was strong drink to his restless blood, blotting out memories, emotions, all, in the fierce exultance of the game. For Gaston was one of the battle breed. Life to him must mean war or lose its savor, and he had that now—out in the black, lawless woods, himself and two dozen men, any one of whom would knife him eagerly if for a moment his grip on them slackened.

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Gaston sat upright beside the driver and hummed an old tune of his rough Norse sire's teaching.

Mile after mile the tote-road ran, straight as a sword-gash, dark and narrow as the road to the "pit," through the tamarack swamp. The horses now had settled down to their rough, heavy-limbed walk, plumping doggedly ahead in the dark, the trace-chains jangling.

The sleighs were becoming silent. The drink was dying out in most of the men, and the steady, even slipping of the sleighs began to lull them to slumber. To those who remained awake the eery humming from the second sleigh reminded them that Gaston was awake and watchful. What little rebellion remained in them died rapidly out. The sleighs went on in silence, save when some man swore at his neighbor's crowding.

The ground at last grew higher, the tamaracks gave way to hardwood and pine, and a clearing with a group of dark cabins showed in the timber.

"An old camp?" queried Gaston.

"Naw!" laughed the driver. "That's where some of those fellers that Hale brought up here tried to settle with their families."

"Where are they now?"

The driver snickered.

"Wall, they're sort of scattered. A couple of 'em are down at the Dam. The rest figgered this country was a leetle too hard for 'em and skedaddled."

"What was the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much, nothing much. But, you see, them cabins was on the road to the old man's camps, and sometimes the boys 'ud stop in on their way from town and, wall, them settlers figgered 'twas healthier to move."

A SHORT distance farther a similar clearing and clump of dark cabins appeared.

"What's this?" asked Gaston. "The same thing?"

"Shore." The driver was silent a moment, then continued, "That's where the rumpus happened that started 'em moving out—couple years back."

"What was that?"

"Oh, they was kind of a hard old-timer named Olson settled down there, and he said that, by Cripes! he'd picked his claim, and he'd settled and was going to stay settled, and there wasn't any gang hard enough to run him out of the country. Some o' the boys was going back to camp sort o' tanked up one night and they stopped in on him, and told him this was an awful hard country and settlers wasn't wanted, but they guessed they'd take his woman and girl along to camp to cook for 'em.

"So they got hold of the women, and the old guy—he was the pure quill all right—he got hold of an ox-yoke, and when the gang got back to camp they had one of the boys in the sleigh too dead to skin. He put up a great fight, the old guy did, when they went back to get him; but they got him. Then the rest of the settlers got scared and cleared out."

Gaston whistled.

"That was pretty rough. Who owns the claims now? Did they have 'em proved up before they left?"

"Proved up, nothing. They ain't any proved-up claims round here. It's all open yet, the claim land. The old man owns most of the timber land 'round here, o' course. Then Havens's girl's got what her old man had, pieces here and there, and that fellow Hale got some people together and bought some that had been proved up, cleared land mostly, to make farms out of. The rest is open to homesteading, but there ain't none of it being done, except by a few of the old man's standbys."

"Why so?"

"Ain't I been telling you it's unhealthy for new settlers trying to horn in here? Like this Olson—he was getting along to where it looked like he might stick, and an accident happened to him, and his widow and girl are down to the Point running the hotel."

"What? Are they——"

"Sure. Hale got the hotel put up for 'em, I understand. Mebbe Doc Sanders and old Perkins, the postmaster, chipped in a little, too. Those fellers certainly like to monkey with the buzz-saw. They seen plenty signs by this time of what happens to folks that try to take holt here, unless they're working for Taggart.

"Not that the old man has anything to do with it, of course," he added hurriedly, "but it just happens that way. The old man kind of naturally gets hard guys around him, and they don't care for those settlers

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and town guys who're trying to tame this country down. Just happens, you know. Old man kind of happens to get hard men on his pay-roll, and," he concluded with an admiring grin at Gaston, "when I heard he'd got you, I sez to the boys, 'Boys, he's got the hardest of 'em all now, and there'll be more softies scared away from here when they hear it, and you darn know it.' "

Gaston slowly stiffened himself to his straightest and slowly turned toward the talkative figure beside him.

"Pardon me, my friend," he said, puzzled, "but let's have that over again. What was it you said about the 'softies'?"

"Why, I just said there'd be some more of 'em skedaddling out of this neck of the woods when they heard that Taggart had got you with him."

Gaston still was puzzled.

"And why do you say that, my friend? Why should any of the 'softies' skeddadle because they heard I'm working for Taggart?"

"Haw, haw!" The driver guffawed appreciatively. "Trying to play fox with the old tote-teamster, eh? Why shouldn't it make 'em move? They'd heard of you; the old man had let 'em know that he expected to get a stiff guy in here pretty soon. Then you do come, and you do show you're a stiff guy, breaking 'Red Shirt' all to pieces, and taming this gang of wolves; and, well, when these would-be settlers hear of it they'll just about figure the gang will be too strong for 'em, and they'll give up."

Gaston sat silent. He began to hum, but the tune ended in discord. Another spell of silence ensued.

"My friend," he said at length, "your meaning begins to soak through my thick head like rain through a mackinaw. You mean that the settlers and the other 'softies' will think that I am one of the gang—of the gang that went to call on old man Olson?"

"Think it!" The driver cackled. "Pretty foxy, you are. Of course; they'll know you're one of the gang. You can't keep that hid, boss."

Gaston slowly collapsed until he sat hunch-shouldered with bowed head. He tried to hum again, but the wild notes died in his throat. He tried to whistle and could not. He sat silent for a space, and then he exploded—

"——!"

As suddenly as he had exploded he grew silent and thoughtful.

"What 'smatter, Gaston Olaf?" muttered Tom Pine sleepily.

"Nothing, nothing is ever the matter," snapped Gaston. "Not unless a man is fool enough to stop and think. Shake 'em up, driver! How long you going to take to cover eight miles?"

The drivers had pulled up on the crest of a long, steep ridge to give the horses a moment's breathing spell, and as Gaston looked back over the direction they had come he saw that the ridge topped all the surrounding country. On a clear day a man might stand there and look over the tree-tops and see even as far as Havens Falls. But now it was very dark on the ridge-top, and no eyes could make out the figure that suddenly hailed them from the brush:

"Taggart's teams?"

The voice was deep and heavy, and obviously disguised, and yet to Gaston there was a tone in it which he seemed to have heard somewhere before, though he could not then remember where or when.

"None of your —— business?" he snapped back at the darkness.

Came a chuckle in reply—

"Oh, all right."

Then he heard the crackle of breaking brush, and the *plup, plup, plup* of snowshoes slipping briskly away.

"Who was that—one of the gang?" asked Gaston.

"I donno," said the driver carelessly. "But you was saying we was taking too long to make eight miles," he continued quickly. "Now right from here where we're standing to Havens Falls, that's five miles by the road we come. Now we go down this ridge, that's a mile; then we swing off and follow the West Branch to the lake, that's about two 'n' a half, and then to the camp, at the far end of the lake, that's another mile. 'Bout eight miles and a half, I make it to this new camp, and we'll be there inside of half a hour. No, I can't say I think we're taking long on the road, boss. Giddap, boys—go 'long!"

Gaston made no reply. Something was whispering to him, telling him to keep his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut; that something remarkable lay before him, as often in the woods his keen intuition or woods-sense often warned him of the presence of big animals, or, when on the river,

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he sensed the presence of dangerous rapids ahead long before the roar of the waters came to his ears.

Five miles from the ridge to Havens Falls! And the driver said it earnestly, as if he thought he would be believed. And that voice from the dark on top of the hill. What of that? Something strange was in the air.

Gaston crossed his legs contentedly. He began to hum. The tune had come back to him now. Above the plump of the horses' hoofs, the rattle of trace-chains and the whine of sleigh-runners rose his humming. It ascended in the dark woods like some chant of battle, as wild, as reckless, as lawless as the primitive woods themselves. Gaston was happy. He was driving toward the unknown. But he had sensed enough of what lay ahead to know that it promised excitement.

AT THE foot of the ridge they came to a cluster of buildings, apparently an old logging-camp, on the banks of a small river, and to Gaston it seemed that the road ended there. Beyond lay the close-standing tamaracks of the river bottom, and he looked in vain for the break in their ranks that marked the presence of a road. To his astonishment the first sleigh pulled straight toward the log wall of what was apparently a bunk-house, built close to the river.

"Hi!" called the lead teamster gruffly.

"All right," came a reply from within the building, and then a section of the wall—a section which Gaston now saw was merely slabs instead of solid logs—slid aside like a barn door on rollers, and through the opening gleamed the white ice of the frozen river.

"Come ahead. Ice safe—keep going."

The teams lunged through the door on the trot. Gaston saw that the building had been a bunk-house, but that now the wall nearest the river had been torn down.

Across the river there was no made road. The teams quickly pulled up to a walk and began warily to pick their way along a crude wagon trail through the tamaracks.

"No tote-road?" asked Gaston casually.

"No tote-road," agreed the driver.

"Not much teaming up this way?"

"Ain't calkilated to be. Small camp, short job. Be cleaned up in a month or six weeks, 'bout the time the ice goes out. Camp's all fitted up. No need for much teaming."

Gaston resumed his humming.

"That was a new one on me, that building with the road through it," he laughed, after a while. "What's the idea?"

"Oh, I donno." Obviously the driver did not wish for further conversation. "You better ask the old man if you hanker to know."

"All right," said Gaston, "I will."

He did not speak again until they reached their destination, but his eyes and his thoughts were busy. And he noted as they pulled across the lake and reached the camp at its head that the timber that stood large, straight and fine all around was not Norway pine, but *white pine.*

Lanterns flashed at their arrival. A man, who in build and vicious expression was a counterpart of Red-Shirt Murphy, came out and took charge.

"Got 'em out, did you?" he greeted Gaston. "All right, I'll unload 'em. Fine bunch of men for the woods, ain't they? We'll give 'em —— tomorrow to start 'em in right. Hear you busted Red Shirt up a little." Gaston wondered how the news had come out there, but said nothing. "He's my brother, the ——! They call me 'Black' Murphy. Wish you'd broke his neck."

Gaston and Tom Pine stood to one side and watched the unloading of the cowed, shivery gang. Most of the men were able to stagger stiffly to their bunks without assistance, but a few, the teamsters, under the big man's direction, dragged like so many sacks of grain through the snow and dumped on the bunk-house floor. When the task was completed Gaston turned to Tom Pine, who was standing alone, looking around in puzzled fashion.

"Tom Pine," he said, "how long have you been in the woods?"

"Longer than you've been alive, Gaston Olaf," replied Tom.

"Do you see any Norways around here?"

"Nope."

"And did you ever see anybody make such crooked trails as this in the logging business?"

Tom Pine scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Once, Gaston Olaf, once I did."

"Where was that?"

"One time—one time old Ezra Howlinson, him that's Senator Howlinson now,

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made a raid on the Couderay Indian Reservation timber. He rounded up a lot of bad ones who were hiding from the sheriff mostly, and did the thing on the quiet. I was drunk, and I joined in with 'em. I was young then, Gaston Olaf."

"Yes."

"Ye-es. And do you know what, Gaston Olaf?"

"What?"

"I been thinking—I been thinking about old Ezra's raid ever since that guy hollered at us on top of the ridge."

CHAPTER IX

"NOT A WHITE MAN'S OUTFIT"

A VOICE woke Gaston next morning in his upper bunk, a voice thin and querulous, and cold as ice. It was still dark, and Gaston had slept little, but that voice woke him like a dash of cold water.

"Well, well, Murphy; so you don't think much of the crew I've sent you?" The voice came from the corner of the room near Gaston's bunk. "Well, well, we all have our tastes. For instance, Murphy, there was a gentleman in Havens Falls last week who actually was anxious for your company. He was indeed. He seemed to hanker for you. Now for myself, Murphy, it is a trial to be forced to spend even a few minutes in your loathsome society. But this gentleman, he asked for you diligently. He even wished you to accompany him back to LaCroix County, Murphy. It seems there was a little safe-blowing done back at the bank there. Also, at the same time, a murder. Yes, yes. I forgot to say that the gentleman was the sheriff of LaCroix County. It was the marshal you killed! Heh, heh, heh!"

"He—he went away again—the sheriff—Mr. Taggart?" That was Murphy's voice, barely able to utter the words.

"Heh, heh! The rope, eh, Murphy, the new, stiff rope, and the black cap, and a little platform—well, well! We won't speak of that. I imagine it isn't pleasant to you. No, Murphy, we won't speak of it again unless you fail to get full work out of the crew I've given you; unless you fail to have the lake full of logs by the time the river's open; unless you fail to keep every man jack in camp until the job is done. In short, Murphy, unless you fail to please me."

"I'll do it, Mr. Taggart," said Black Murphy in his dry voice. "I'll murder any man who begins to get funny and ask questions."

"No details, Murphy, please. I do not wish to know how you do things. I merely wish them done. Now, as for getting the work out of the men, I have got this young man, Thorson. I am something of a judge of men, Murphy, and I am sure this young man will make the best man-breaker and man-driver I have ever seen in the woods. His partner is a nonentity; you can let him drive team. But, Thorson, Murphy, you must bow to Thorson. Yes, Murphy, with proper education I am sure I can make a better brute out of him even than of you.

"So, remember, Murphy, I will have no quarreling with him. Let all be peace between you. Heh, heh, heh! Not much peace for a man when he thinks of the rope, is there, Murphy? Well, well! And come over the hill and report tonight. I'll stay there till tomorrow. Now roust the men out as soon as I'm out of camp, and get them to work."

There was the sound of steps as they both cautiously left the bunk-house. After a while Murphy returned; and then his voice rang out harshly.

"Roll out! Roll out!" He tramped around the room making a din to wake the dead-drunk. "Get out and get at it! Roll out before you get cold water on you!"

Gaston leaped down as if suddenly awakened.

"Hello, boss," he greeted sleepily. "Want me to help get 'em out?"

"Sure, if you want to," replied Murphy, and together they began to drag the reluctant ones from their bunks.

Gaston worked with a will. He was anxious to see what Taggart intended for him, and he realized that his rôle for the present must be that of the apparently unthinking driver of men. He chuckled at the spectacle presented by the men at the breakfast table. The alcoholic ebullition and spirit of the night before had burned out, and the men were down to their true level. Shuffling, cringing, shivering, they staggered in to eat; broken men, shaky for want of the morning drink, every last one of them.

"Boys," said Black Murphy, as they

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swilled their food, "you've had your good spree. You've been on it a week. Now you're going to work. This is a short job. We'll knock it down in a month if we work. Then you can all go back to town. You've all come out here pledged to stay till that's done. Understand? There's no leaving camp till the job's done. That's the bargain, and the man who tries to sneak out—well, he'll never make it, that's all. That's the old man's orders. Do you all hear me?"

"That's the bargain," growled a few in reply. "We're next."

"And there won't anybody come out here looking for anybody if you don't get funny," supplemented Murphy.

There was a ducking of frowzled heads at this, as if each man suddenly grew sensitive.

"And now having heard that you're safe here, you cheap crooks—" it was Gaston Olaf speaking now—"having heard that no sheriff will be allowed to come out and get any of you, it's time you got out and hustled. Where do you start logging, Murphy?"

"Right outside of camp, along the lake. We'll log in from the lake."

"All right. You throw 'em at the work, and I'll see they keep going. You set the wedge, I'll drive it in. How's that?"

"Suits me," said Murphy. "Come on, boys, pick out your tools and get started."

IT WAS boy's play, the logging that was laid out for them. The trees grew to the very edge of the bluffs overlooking the small, shut-in lake. To fell the trees, log them up, skid them to the edge of the bluff and roll them over was all that was required. There were no roads to be built, no swamping to be done, no loading.

The pine—white pine all of it—grew tall and free, unhampered by smaller trees or underbrush, and Gaston saw that even the gang of wrecks he had brought out from town would turn out a respectable cut each day. As the great tops of the first trees began swaying as the saws rasped through, he looked from their noble trunks to the men who were nibbling with such deadly effect at their butts, and he turned away with an exclamation of disgust.

"That's the way I feel, too, Gaston Olaf," said Tom Pine, halting at Gaston's side the team he had been given to skid with. "I never did like to see the big trees go down, but for pines like them—" he looked with true reverence up at the magnificent trunks—"to be downed by fellows like these, it—it don't seem to jibe. I—I don't feel much like I want to be in on this job, Gaston Olaf. There's a stink around here, with that lie about the kind of pine here, and all. It's not a white man's outfit. You know that yourself."

"You're hard to please, Tom Pine," laughed Gaston. "When we were in town you wanted to get back into the woods. Now we're here and you want to travel again. What's the matter: got a feeling that something different is going to happen here, too?"

"Well, it did happen in town, didn't it?"

"You bet! And that's what I'm looking for here too. I want something different to happen, Tom Pine, something that will tell me why this outfit makes such funny, crooked trails. You skid logs and say nothing for a time, Tom Pine. I'm going to look around. I got a scent that may take me to where the thing that made these trails is bedding down."

"And then what?"

"Then what? Why, some excitement, let's hope, Tom Pine. What else would I hunt the end of the trail for? Fun, excitement! Tom Pine, I got a hunch that there's a whole raft of it somewhere before us."

When the opportunity offered, Gaston slipped out of sight of the men into the forest. He was curious about Taggart. Where was "over the hill," where Murphy was to report to Taggart that evening?

There were plenty of hills about, in fact the lake was ringed with hills, but out in the untracked snow of the woods Gaston looked only for Taggart's trail. He found it at last on the ice of a tiny watercourse, where the tracks scarcely showed, and he followed it away from camp at full speed.

The trail curved for half a mile around the foot of a hill, then dipped through a ravine, and seemed to end abruptly in a close-growing clump of small cedars, snugly hidden in a tiny valley.

A column of blue smoke rising from the center of the cedars drew Gaston forward. He left the trail and circled carefully, skilfully keeping himself hidden, and crept slowly forward under the low-hanging branches into the heart of the thicket.

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He had not gone far when he crouched suddenly, and sat staring in amazement. Before him, hidden from the world by four walls of trees, lay a small clearing, and in the clearing was a comfortable, well-built log house.

Compared to the average settler's cabin the place even manifested evidences of taste, wealth and luxury on the part of the owner. Large-paned windows in solid, planed frames; a high-pitch roof, neatly shingled; a milled door; lace curtains on the windows; and a neat brick chimney topping it all, were among the surprising differences between this house and the common log-cabins of the country. The place was not builded as were other cabins of the big woods—a mere, heavy-walled shelter against cruel Winter weather. It was built for the delight of the ones who lived in it, and the job was well done.

The artistic side of Gaston's nature was moved. He saw that the door stood slightly ajar, and began to crawl toward a position where it might be possible to peek inside the house. Suddenly from within there came to his ears the rattle of a piano, snatches of song, and the tinkling, reckless laughter of women.

"What's this—what's this?"

The blood in Gaston's young veins was leaping in response to the music, the laughter of women. He crouched, with his hands parting the branches before him.

> And he'll never come back, no, he'll never come back,
> Your lover you'll ne'er see alive.
> Then another I'll get, he will help me forget
> My lover who went down in the drive.

"Whoop-la!" whispered Gaston. It was a woman—nay, a girl—who was singing the crude old song, and her voice seemed to float out and draw Gaston forward. He could never resist that song. It had in its simple notes the joy and pang, the unreckoning loves, the sudden deaths of the life of the woods.

He leaned forward eagerly, too eagerly, for his head showed clear of the branches. He saw his mistake and tried to draw back, but he was too late. The door flung open sharply. Devil Dave Taggart, his bulk filling the doorway, looked out, laughing.

"Come out of there, Thorson. Come out, man, and come in!" he called.

His voice was full and commanding. It was the voice that had hailed the sleighs on the hill the night before.

CHAPTER X.

DEVIL DAVE AT PLAY

IT WAS a different Taggart who stood there in the doorway. Instead of the ministerial frock-coat, he wore a flaming red sweater. He stood with his head up, his shoulders straight and broad, and he was laughing in great, open-mouthed guffaws. There was no whine, no pettiness in his voice now; instead he roared like a bull.

His carefully combed beard was disordered and blazing; his face was flushed and red; and Gaston saw to his amazement that he had been mistaken when he judged Taggart to be an elderly, decrepit man.

Gaston strode forward without hesitation. He had sprung to his feet the instant he saw that he was discovered, and his eyes had begun to blaze at the insinuation in Taggart's first words. More than this, he realized that he was caught in an undignified position, and the touch of vanity in his character set his blood boiling.

"You don't have to holler at me, my hairy old friend. My ears are first-rate," he called as he came up to the door. "I'm not asking for a bid in. If I'd wanted to come in I'd have come. But when I see a trail that interests me, I've got a habit of doing a little tracking, and no favors asked from anybody in the world."

"Ho, ho, my boy! Spoken well; spoken as I want you to speak! Give me your paw and forget your hair-trigger temper."

Yes, it was a very different Taggart, indeed. The ice had thawed. The Winter had gone out of his eyes and lips. It was full Summer; the river of life was running warm in him. The warmth encompassed Gaston as Taggart threw his long arm around his shoulder. The genial laughter of the old man was like a Summer breeze.

"Come in; come in, boy! Just in time. We'll have a celebration."

Before Gaston realized what was happening he was in the house, the door was shut, and he was joining in the laughter, warmed to the heart, and swept off his feet by the new Taggart's geniality and magnetism. His eyes took in the room at a glance, and he blinked and removed his cap. The room was an anomaly there in the woods. It had

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an oiled hardwood floor, plastered walls, and delicate blue wall-paper. There were easy chairs, cushions, pictures, shaded lamps, a piano, rugs, and a canary in a gilded cage. A nest of luxury, and two women at the piano to complete the picture. One of the women was tall, dark, majestic of proportions, set of feature, and probably over thirty-five. The other was small, plump and blond, childish of face, and probably twenty.

"My sister," said Taggart, indicating the tall woman. "And my little niece, Carrie."

Oh, another man I'll get; he will help me forget
My lover who went down in the drive.

sang the young girl, with her eyes on Gaston.

"Another bottle we'll get," laughed Taggart. "Sit down, Thorson."

The dark woman rose with a weary smile on her lips and stepped out of the room, to return in a moment with a bottle of champagne. Soon the glasses were brimming with the bubbling stuff, and Taggart drank, filled his glass and drank again, smiling as the bubbles went down his huge, hairy throat.

"Drink, boy, drink!" he urged. "Don't look at it; don't save it. The cellar's full of it. Throw it into you."

Taggart had had much champagne this morning, Gaston now saw. It had warmed him, expanded him, made him blustering and reckless.

"The old Adam, Thorson," he chuckled, "the old Adam must out now and then. 'Tisn't good for man to keep the old Adam suppressed too long. On the other hand, 'It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to indulge in strong drink'—in public. Consequently I come out to my—to my sister's here, every once in a while and turn old Adam loose. 'All work and no play' you know; this is my way of playing. Another bottle, Dell. Carrie, you may have a bottle of root-beer. Little nieces mustn't have strong drink."

The girl laughed and the dark woman smiled her enigmatic smile.

"Thorson, a toast!" Taggart waved his glass so the wine flew about the room. "A man's toast, Thorson; a hard man's toast. Join me?"

"You know me," laughed Gaston.

"I think so," Taggart nodded soberly. "I think I do. You are a man of my own caliber. Murphy—the two Murphys—and the rest of my gang, they're just scum. You—Thorson—you ought to go far with me. There's room for two big men in this neck of the woods, Thorson—just two. Not any more; not a lot of pulling, grubbing settlers; not a lot of whining storekeepers. But plenty room enough for two. I'm Number One; there's no reason why you shouldn't be Number Two. But there's only one way to do it: that's to keep the other fellows out. Keep 'em scared off. Keep 'em from getting a foothold. Settlers—ha, ha! They're discovering what they'll meet with when they try to come plowing up my stamping-ground."

He lolled in his chair, huge, barbaric, his red-gray beard bristling, the two fang-like teeth showing beneath it, his eyes red and leering.

"I want this country to stay the way it is!" he exploded. "I want it with the bark on. So do you—I know that! You and I can keep it that way, Thorson. And we're going to do it."

He chuckled in his beard.

Oh, fill up your glasses steady,
And hold up your glasses high.
Here's to the dead already,
And here's to the next man to die.

"Ha, ha! Pretty little thing, isn't it, Thorson? Who's going to be the next? Well, any man who tries to come nosing around my stamping-ground. And that's Hale. I hear he started this way this morning. Well, we're ready for him. Law? I make the law up here. And it's against my law to try to keep me from doing anything I want to do."

The girl was at the piano, singing and laughing; the dark woman was bringing another bottle of wine. The room was heavy with languorous perfume, and the wine had begun to warm Gaston's mind. And yet he was not at ease. Here was music and wine, woman and song. He was young, and the blood in his veins coursed warmly. And yet he rebelled against all this.

"I've got to get back to camp," he said suddenly. "I'd only intended to be gone a few minutes. Murphy's grip on the men isn't strong enough to leave him alone. If you'll excuse me, I'll be going."

"All right." Taggart was all business again. "Logging is logging."

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The dark woman smiled her strange smile.

GASTON went back to camp as straight and as rapidly as his legs could carry him.

"Tom Pine," he said, finding the little man alone, "something serious is the matter with me."

"Yes?" said Tom Pine.

"Tom Pine," continued Gaston, "I've always been something of a roarer when I had the chance, haven't I?"

"Well, you ain't exactly dead when you've got a chance to liven up, if that's what you mean."

"Did you ever know me to act bashful when I had wine and music and pretty women fairly thrown at me?"

Tom Pine spat.

"What's eating you, Gaston Olaf?" he demanded.

"We're going to travel," said Gaston suddenly. Tom Pine dropped the reins eagerly. "You were right, Tom Pine. This is no white man's outfit; it's no place for us. Taggart had me sized up wrong when he sent word for me. We're rough, Tom Pine, and we're tough; but I don't think we can work for Devil Dave."

"I said we couldn't," chimed in Tom. "There's a kind of a stink around here that I don't like."

"You said it," agreed Gaston. "Ready to travel?"

Tom nodded. Gaston turned the team toward the stables and slapped them with the reins.

"Giddap!" They waited and watched to see that the horses were traveling for shelter. "Now, come on."

Gaston swiftly led the way into the timber out of sight of the men of the camp, Tom Pine following, silent and unquestioning, as was his wont on their travels.

"We'll hit for the creek, then down to that old shack that we drove through, and then down the road to town."

"Sure thing," said Tom Pine. "But there'll probably be somebody there at that old shack, Gaston Olaf. They don't keep that gate there for nothing."

"I want to see if they do keep somebody there," replied Gaston, hurrying along. "I want to see how far the old man would go to keep anybody from nosing around his stamping-ground."

"Devil Dave? He'd go the limit, I'll bet. Why; what you heard, Gaston Olaf?"

"Hale," said Gaston. "I heard he'd started out this way this morning."

"Hale?" repeated Tom. "That fellow who got his arm broke? What does he want out here?"

"I don't know, but I've got a suspicion."

"He's a town man, anyhow. What have we got to do with him?"

"Nothing; nothing to do—with Hale," snapped Gaston, and hurried along.

To their surprise they found no one at the building on the river where the road from town seemed to end. In one end of the shack was fitted up a room, with bunk and stove and a shelf of provisions. The stove was still warm, though the fire in it had died out.

"Gate-tender's off the job," said Tom Pine. He looked around reminiscently. "Gaston Olaf, d'you know what this reminds me of? Reminds me of the way old Ezra Howlinson kept strangers from accidentally wandering in on him when he was raiding that old Couderay Res'vation. Had a man with a shotgun—Hell's fire! What's that?"

From somewhere on the top of the ridge beyond there came faintly the *pop, pop* of a rifle fired twice slowly. Gaston and Tom looked at one another.

"Deer on a ridge this time of the year?" said Tom doubtfully.

"Deer nothing!" said Gaston, and started running up the road toward whence the sound of the shots came.

There was nothing to be seen when he finally came panting to the top of the mile-long slope. Yes, there was something, after all. A pair of field-glasses lay in the snow between the sleigh tracks. Gaston picked them up; a bullet had smashed and torn them to pieces.

There was blood, too, not far away, a thin, smudged streak of red on the snow, and a spot where a man had fallen. The signs were as so much clear English to Gaston. He leaped toward the red marks. There it was, a dragging trail of red, and clumsy marks, such as a wounded animal makes, leading into the brush. And as Gaston stooped to view it more closely there came from the brush a voice—Hale's voice, by all that was holy—faint, but with its old quietness in it.

"Look out, boys! Jump in the brush.

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They got me when I was standing right there."

And in the brush Hale lay helpless, his well hand clutching his left leg where a bullet had pierced the muscles below the knee.

CHAPTER XI

GASTON BEGINS TO THINK

GASTON and Tom Pine were too experienced to waste the next few precious seconds in exclamations. By the volume of red that spurted through Hale's clutching fingers, and by the tallow color creeping about his mouth, they saw in a flash that their cue was to act instantly and in a desperate hurry.

Tom Pine's hunting-knife slit Hale's clothes to the skin in the same second that Gaston whipped off his red silken sash. They handled their patient roughly perhaps, but efficaciously. In a remarkably short time the bleeding was stopped, the leg thoroughly bandaged and Hale was sitting propped up against the trunk of a jack-pine.

"Now a little hit of this and you'll be feeling alive again," said Tom Pine, producing a small flask from an inside pocket, but Hale, with the pallor and perspiration of pain on his face, set his jaw firmly and shook his head.

"Thanks; I'll stick it out without anything," he whispered.

"You will not," said Tom Pine. "You'll take a good hit. I know what's good for you."

"Leave him alone," said Gaston. "He's got ideas on that subject."

He scooped a great handful of clean snow and held it up to Hale's burning lips. The thirst of the bullet-torn was upon Hale and he gulped the snow feverishly and lay back refreshed.

"And now while we're waiting for you to come back to life enough to move you—what are you and your bum arm doing this far from home?" demanded Gaston. "Isn't a crippled arm enough for you at one time?"

Hale attempted to smile.

"Funny question, Thorson," he said with effort. "Natural thing to ask would be, 'Who did it?' "

"Oh, no. Funny thing to me isn't that you'd get shot, but that you'd be so far from town."

Hale looked up quietly. Gaston was conscious of a growing respect for this little town man. Yes; he realized that he was even inclined to like him; but he thought of the manner in which the girl had held her arm under Hale's head and felt instinctively that this man was his rival.

"Yes?" said Hale steadily. "All right. But if you're with Taggart, Thorson, why didn't you let me lie here and bleed?"

"With Taggart?" repeated Gaston. "Why d'you say that?"

"Well, if you're not with Taggart I don't see why you should be so strong against me."

"Twice I've picked you up now," laughed Gaston. "Does that look much like I was against you?"

Hale nodded.

"I'll remember that. If there's ever a chance——"

"——!" laughed Gaston. "Do I look as if I ever would need any help from you? Now, what were you doing out here?"

Hale sat silent for a while.

"I can't tell you that, Thorson," he said finally. "I don't know where you stand."

"All right. Then—who shot you?"

Hale looked up.

"Don't you know?"

"What?" Tom Pine and Gaston exploded as one.

"Why—why, you little, stove-hugging, high-banker, you!" roared Tom Pine. "D'you think—d'you think——"

"Shut up, Tom Pine!" laughed Gaston. "Of course he thinks that! We're Taggart's men, you know, Tom Pine," he continued with a wink. "Of course, of course."

"All I know," said Hale, "is that I was standing at the peak of the road——"

"With a pair of field-glasses to your eyes."

"With a pair of field-glasses in my hand," corrected Hale, "and two shots came from off in the timber there to the right. The first knocked the glasses out of my hand. The second hit me in the leg. Apparently they didn't want to kill me, or——"

"They'd have plugged you through the head first clip. Sure. But what were you doing there with the glasses?"

"Thorson," said Hale wearily, "I'll never forget what you've done for me, and I'll even it up with you if I ever can. I'm helpless now, so I've got to ask one more favor from you. My rig is tied up down the road

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about a mile. Will you get it up here for me so I can get back to town?"

"Go get his rig, Tom," snapped Gaston. "He'll be fit to move by the time you're back."

"I'd better leave the bottle," said Tom, "in case——"

"Leave nothing! He's a good guy. Liquor—that's for toughs like us. Go get the team."

When Tom Pine had hurried down the road Gaston settled back on his heels, glaring at Hale. Hale returned his look steadily except when pain and weakness forced him to close his eyes. Gaston rose in exasperation and began to tramp to and fro. Presently he stopped before the wounded man.

"Hale," he said, "don't you think I'm a white man?"

Hale made no reply. Gaston's great neck swelled with anger, but astonishment held him speechless. This was something new, something different. His life had been rough and varied, but no man yet had had cause to question for a moment that he was white.

"You mean to say you don't think I'm square?" he demanded in amazement.

Hale cleared his throat as if about to make a long speech, then seemed to change his mind.

"You ought to be a square man, by the eye of you," he said, "but you're Taggart's man——"

"Tom Pine!" bellowed Gaston, hurling himself out of hearing. "Hurry up with that rig!"

Tom soon appeared, appreciatively holding the reins over a pair of thin-legged drivers.

"He's got a good eye for a horse, even if he don't use liquor, this guy has, Gaston Olaf. I'll bet this pair'd step close to three minutes."

"Swing 'em around. Point 'em back toward town. Get out. Help me load him."

Gaston barked his commands savagely, and Tom Pine, looking at him, noted the iron set of the jaw, the clouded brows, and swore in amazement.

"I believe you're mad, Gaston Olaf," said Tom. "Yes, sir; something has got you mad like other folks at last."

"Shut up!"

They loaded Hale, handling him carefully, and tucked the lap-robes closely around him. He was white and sagging by this time, but he reached gamely out for the reins.

"Hell's fire and six-bits!" roared Tom Pine. "He thinks we'd leave him to get back alone!"

"Get in."

Gaston's command was quiet and as firm as iron. Hale's eyes widened in surprise as they mounted one on each side of him, holding him comfortably and warmly between them.

"Giddap!" said Gaston, and the drive back to Havens Falls was begun.

GASTON OLAF sat silent, staring straight before him, as the team jogged steadily onward, mile after mile. It was an unusual thing for him to do. He, always terrifically, explosively alive, was not wont to fail in appreciation of the delights of a sunny, keen March day, of a tote-road with just enough snow remaining to make good sleighing, and a team of drivers which, trotting rump to rump, whisked the cutter along with scarcely a jerk or jar. But today no laughter, no running comment on scenes along the road, no bellowed venting of the unsuppressible joy of living. Gaston sat sour and glum.

He was not angry. He was shocked; he was dumfounded. Some one actually had questioned whether he, Gaston Olaf François Thorson, was a square man! His courage, his strength, his skill in the woods or daring on the river—any or all of these a man might have questioned and he would have laughed. But this—this was different. For a man's squareness, as Gaston understood it, was the foundation of a man's whole life. If the foundation was rotten the man was rotten. And if a man was rotten, he belonged, not among the people who held their heads up and looked the world in the eye, but among people who slunk and squinted—among the Red-Shirt Murphys and their ilk.

"You ought to be a square man, by the eye of you, but—you're Taggart's man."

Quite true; Taggart's man, like Murphy and the other jail-birds. Birds of a feather. It was very simple. And Gaston, who up to now had swaggered his way through life, self-assured and proud, caring not one whit for the opinion of any man, or woman, wondered in fear if she of the wonderful eyes,

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too, had put him down as a man who was not square.

"Shake 'em up, Tom!" he barked. "This man needs a doctor."

"Shake 'em up?" repeated Tom Pine. "What you been doing, boy, sleeping? We're almost in town."

"Then chase 'em along; they can stand a run for a short distance."

CHAPTER XII

TAGGART'S MAN NO LONGER

IT WAS noon when they whirled into town at a full trot and pulled up before Olson's Hotel. For the second time Gaston took Hale in his arms and bore him up to his room, and for a second time Dr. Sanders came up the steps two at a time.

"It'll never do, Hale, never do at all," rattled the doctor. "This habit of getting bunged up is growing on you too rapidly. Arm yesterday, leg today. Bad, bad habit. Next thing you know you'll break your luck. Then where'll you be at? Hullo! Thirty-thirty caliber did that. Clean as a whistle. Flesh wound. No bones touched. Have to keep you in bed a few days, though; break you of habit of getting busted and shot up.

"Hot water, Hulda, thou potential mother of vikings. What? Going right away, Thorson? Not back to the bush right away? See you in the back room in a few minutes."

Gaston was going down the stairs as the last words came shouted after him. He was not interested in Hale's leg or the doctor's cheerful conversation. He had serious personal business in hand; and so without waste of time he marched up the street, turned past the post-office, strode up the walk to the front door of the Havens's home, and knocked.

He heard a faint clatter of dishes within, then, like the tinkle of the silver bell of the church at Saint Madeline, came her voice—

"Come in!"

Gaston did not obey.

"Come in!"

Still Gaston did not enter.

"Well! Who can that be?" he heard her say; heard her rise from the table; then the sound of her tiny feet tripping lightly toward him.

"Why don't you come—oh!"

She flung open the door and started as she saw him. She was wearing a long apron, and her sleeves were rolled up over tiny, dimpled arms. Her hair was in disarray, and her face was reddened as if from the preparation of a meal. She was startled, even shocked, to see him standing there, grim-faced, his cap in his hands; but her hands went instantly to her head to put back straying brown locks. And then she laughed, for he was so very glum and serious in contrast to his swaggering manner of the night before.

"Why—why didn't you come in?" she said. "Didn't you hear me call?"

"Yes; but you didn't know who it was. I didn't know if I'd be welcome."

"Oh! How different!" She smiled mischievously. "I didn't know that you usually hesitated to discover if you were welcome or not."

"Rosebud!" came reprovingly from within. "Is that nice? Who is it? Has he had dinner?"

"No, mother; he hasn't — You look hungry, you know, Mr. Thorson—Get another plate, mother dear. He's going to eat with us."

"Are you willing to have the brute——"

"Now, don't bring that up, Mr. Thorson. I felt sorry the second after I'd said it. I only said it because I was angry. But it isn't nice of you to remind me that I was a pig."

"Miss Havens," said Gaston doggedly, "I came up here to ask you one question: Do you think I'm a square man?"

"Of course!" Her reply came spontaneously. "But—" she grew quickly serious and thoughtful—"I also think you are the wildest, most reckless, most foolish boy I've ever seen."

"But," he insisted, "don't you think I'm one of Taggart's men?"

She shook her head slowly, the while looking him searchingly in the eyes.

"You couldn't be—one of those, could you?"

"Why couldn't I?"

"No." She shook her head again. "No, you couldn't be, because—because you couldn't. You—you don't belong with that kind. You know you don't."

"Where do you think I do belong?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose people have to decide that for themselves." Her gaze roved over him and

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went to the floor. "But you—I believe you could do anything fine—no matter what—that you really wanted to. What can you see in the rough life you're leading, roaming around, fighting, a man like you? It's so boyish. What does it amount to? And there are so many real things, worth-while things, calling for men like you to do—especially in a country to be hewed out of the woods, like this. Things that only men like you can do.

"I should think you'd want to be doing something. I know I would if I were a man. It thrills me. Here are men breaking Nature for the use of men. I love it! I—oh, come to the table; I'm forgetting. Come. Mother dear," she called, leading the way into another room, "this is Mr. Thorson."

"Yes," said the little old lady at the table. "Sit right down here, Mr. Thorson, and help yourself. I'm glad of the chance to thank you for taking care of my Rosebud yesterday morning. If we had a few men like you, Mr. Thorson, I'm thinking such things wouldn't happen much longer in Havens Falls. As it is, I often think we shall have to move away."

"We won't," said Rose vehemently. "They sha'n't scare us out. It's our home, and I love it—and we're going to stay. Sugar, Mr. Thorson?"

Gaston went through the meal in a sort of haze. It had been a long time since he had sat down to such a table in such a room, and in such company. A snow-white tablecloth; tiny, fragile dishes; the gentle little white-haired lady at the head of the table, and the girl, with sleeves rolled up over dimpled arms, urging him to eat.

In the windows were plants; a tall clock ticked homily in a corner. Gaston was out of place. He was uncomfortable. Yet he sensed the permanence, the security, the comfort of the place. It was a home. And once more Gaston Olaf hungered wistfully for something, something for which a craving had been bred in him, and which his rough mode of life denied him.

He finished his meal as quickly as possible without being rude. He knew he was out of place there, did not belong, had no right. These things were not for him. Not now, at least, whispered something in him.

"Will you shake hands with me, Mrs. Havens?" he said as he rose to go.

"Why—why, of course!" The little silvery-haired lady took his big hand in astonishment. "What a queer boy you are!"

"Thanks," said Gaston. "I feel a lot better than when I came in here."

"Aha! A recommendation for my cooking!" cried Rose.

"I didn't mean that——"

"Aho! You didn't, eh? You mean to say my cooking isn't calculated to make any one feel better. Oh, very well."

"Rose, dear!" protested the mother.

"I mean, a man might get grub a lot of places to make him feel better," said Gaston, "but——"

His sweeping gesture indicated the girl, the mother, the room and all, better than words could have done.

"How pretty!" cried Rose. "That was French—*très gallant, m'sieu.* Imagine a man named Thorson doing that, mother."

"Rose, dear," chided the mother. "But 'Thorson' isn't a French name, Mr. Thorson?"

"My full name," said Gaston, "is Gaston Olaf François Thorson. Gaston François from my French mother; Olaf Thorson from my father, Norwegian. But I'm American. Don't forget that."

" 'Olaf Thorson,' " repeated Rose. "My, what a sturdy, steady-going dependable sort of name it is with the 'Gaston François' left out!"

"It's hard to leave it out, though," he replied, "they're all so closely mingled. And I guess I'm well named," he concluded with a laugh. "Good-by."

"Good-by."

He was at the door when the old lady called after him:

"I forgot to ask—are you really working for Taggart, and—helping him—Mr. Thorson?"

"No, ma'am," laughed Gaston. "I certainly am not. No matter what things may look like—I'm not working for Taggart."

CHAPTER XIII

THE CROOK TRAIL EXPOSED

"WHAT ho, Big Fellow!" greeted Dr. Sanders, as Gaston entered his private sanctum. "Help yourself to the poison there. Now, Tom, where does that road go from the swamp?"

"Keep on, north, doc, to the crick—like this."

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Tom Pine was following with a hardened forefinger a line on the map over which he and the doctor were poring. Gaston joined them without accepting the invitation regarding the poison.

The map was a large, carefully drawn affair of the country about Havens Falls, apparently the work of a skilled engineer and observer who had painstakingly cruised the district on foot and knew every square mile of the country which he mapped. The town-site of Havens Falls, neatly plotted on the bend of the river, was in the center. A footnote concerning it read:

"Site ideal; high; solid; no danger from floods. Drinking water excellent; water-power of falls capable of great development."

Of the great tamarack swamp to the north was noted:

"10,000 acres, first-class farm land when burnt over and ditched."

Along the river were several notes:

"Good deposits of brick clay." There were ridges marked: "Some trace of iron," or "bare, glacial, moraine." In other places were "white pine," "Norway," "hardwood." Some valleys were marked, "red clay," others, "black loam."

Rivers were labeled with their drop per mile, lakes by their depth. The Big LaCroix River at intervals was marked, "Good mill site." One of these at the mouth of a bayou attracted Gaston's attention. His eyes lighted with appreciation as he studied the map. A woodsman had but to look at it and the whole country around was spread out before him as in a panorama.

Tom Pine's forefinger was tracing the line of the road up the river, as they had traveled it the night before.

"Here's where we leave the marsh, doc, and go up into the timber, jest like it is here. Here's where we pass them clearings, jest where they're marked. Then we keep on. Pretty soon we come to this big ridge here. Then we go up over that and down to the crick at the bottom, and——"

"That's where the road stops on the map." The doctor was visibly excited.

"I see it does," continued Tom imperturbably. "But we didn't stop there. We went across the crick and swung west——"

"West? West? Are you sure it wasn't east, Tom? Thorson, did you swing west?"

Gaston nodded.

"It couldn't have been east. We'd have had to cross the LaCroix to do that. We went west, along the far side of that branch."

Dr. Sanders swung around, poured himself a drink, tossed it off and swung back again.

"By the claws of Old Nicky! H'm, h'm! West—along the far side of that crick! Are you sure, boys? It was dark, you know. Are you sure you've got it right? Yes, yes. I'm afraid you have. Well, where then, Tom?"

"Then we kept on along the crick for some distance, until we come to the lake that the crick runs out of, and then we swung along the lake—what in Sam Hill, doc? What for have you got that corner turned down over the lake like that? You're hiding the spot where that camp is at."

Dr. Sanders suddenly whisked the map off the table and rolled it up. Then he sat down heavily.

"Boys, this looks like the devil," he said solemnly.

"What does?" said Gaston.

The doctor smote the map.

"You notice I've got that lake covered," he said. "I'm afraid to follow your trail to the finish, alone. I may be wrong; I may be reading the map wrong. The man who made the map is the one to lift that corner off the lake. Boys, I don't know if you realize what this means. I'm asking you as a favor: will you come with me and tell all this to the man who made this map?"

"Certainly," replied Gaston. "Where is he?"

"In bed in his room over at Olson's."

"Hale?"

"Hale—Dick Hale."

"I thought Hale was just a teetotaler of a storekeeper?"

"He's that, too. But he's a civil engineer and a geologist, and a whole lot of other things, too. He made that map. He's probably the only man in the world who could make it. Not even old Taggart has mushed over this country like Hale has. And that's why he's the man who's got to lift the corner of this map."

"All right." Gaston nodded grimly. "We'll go over and repeat to him what we've told you. But first I want to ask you a question, Dr. Sanders: Do you think I'm a square man?"

Dr. Sanders's jaw dropped in amazement.

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He stared at Gaston, and finally broke out into laughter.

"Do I think you're square? Of course! What are you driving at, Thorson?"

"Hale doesn't," said Gaston.

"H'm, h'm! Hale doesn't, eh? Well, Hale, mighty cautious fellow—quiet, calm, judicial-minded—judges things and men with the acid test. You've got to show him. That's Hale. Understand?"

"He's got me judged as Taggart's man."

"We-ell—I told you you'd be sorry about that, didn't I? Couldn't blame people for putting you among the bad ones when you choose to run with 'em. How can people judge except by actions, 'specially a stranger's? And Dick Hale, you know, hasn't had the pleasure of talking to you over the bottle—couldn't possibly know you as I do, you know. And until he knows, that boy doesn't warm up."

"Do you think I'm one of Taggart's men?"

"Sixteen long-tailed devils! What are you talking about? Haven't I asked you to liquor with me after you've been in Taggart's camp? D'you think I'd do that if I didn't know you were white?"

"And the other people—square people—around here. What do they think?"

"We-ell." Dr. Sanders stroked his beard. "I told you you'd be sorry for running with that pack of scum."

"Not a —— bit." Gaston's mouth was grim and hard. "Glad I did it. Just the thing."

"But what's happened to you, Thorson? You—you caring about what people think of you! Whoa, ho! Getting soft, young viking? Civilization taking the iron out of you, too? I never thought this of you."

"Neither did I," said Gaston. "Because until this morning I never thought any one'd ever have reason for doubting that I was white."

"H'm, h'm! Old boy, pardon me, but if you'll let me diagnose your case, I guess you never stopped to think much at all about anything, did you?"

"I guess that's right, too."

"No more than a storm. You just naturally tore along and tore things up, and tore on again."

Gaston nodded.

"And why should a raging, blowing storm bother about people's opinions?" laughed the doctor.

Gaston scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, doc, I guess it's because a man feels sometimes he can't keep on storming all his life."

"H'm, h'm! Perhaps. But, come on; let's storm over and see the man who made this map."

He led the way across to the hotel, went up the stairs two at a time, complimented Hulda on the size of the forearms she displayed as she held a cooling drink to Hale's lips, and felt the wounded man's pulse, all at top speed and chattering constantly.

"H'm, h'm! Got some fever, old dog! Going to have some more. Got some news here calculated to make your temperature rise, but it won't wait. Don't let it make you boil if you can help it, old man. Hulda, your wholesome presence in the room usually is worth a dozen doctors, but just hie your airy, fairy little form hence for the present. Get out; skedaddle; mooch!"

Hulda chuckled far down in her deep bosom as she moved toward the door.

"You are offul frash sometime, doctor," she said. "If I didn't like you so much I skud smeck you one."

"Ha! What? H'm, h'm!" The doctor waited until the door had closed on her and unrolled the map. "Follow the trail over again, boys," he said briskly. "Tell Hale here just what you told me. And, Hale, you were wrong; Thorson isn't Taggart's man. Now shoot, boys."

Gaston described the course of the road they had traveled in taking the crew into camp. As his finger followed the road along the West Branch, Hale suddenly turned up the folded corner of the map and revealed the lake which he had drawn as it lay at the head of the creek. There was no surprise on Hale's face as Gaston's finger ran along the shore to the location of Taggart's new camp.

"I thought so, but I wasn't quite sure," said he. "That's why I went out to the big ridge this morning. You can look over to Loon Lake—that's what that lake is—from the big ridge with glasses. That's what I was preparing to do when they shot me. Read what's written there where you're holding your finger."

Gaston bent over and read aloud:

"Clear growth white pine; 2,000,000 feet or more. Owned by Rose Havens."

"Then it's so?" cried Dr. Sanders. "Devil Dave Taggart——"

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"Yes, he's stealing Miss Havens's timber," said Hale.

"Hell's fire!" roared Tom Pine. "I knew we hadn't any business there."

Gaston stood silently looking down at the map. His face was granite hard, and the light of recklessness was missing. He lifted his eyes and looked first at the doctor then at Hale.

"And I'm the man who got that crew up there in time to do the job," he said quietly. "Taggart fooled me. He was too smart for me. And I was too hot-headed to listen to you."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE COURAGE OF MR CADY

By Ross Ellis

Author of "Just Nuts," "The Giveaway Game," etc.

"OLD 'FOUR-EYES' has a pistol in the top drawer of his desk. He showed it to me this morning." It was the voice of Tommy Doak, the bill-clerk.

"What's he think he'll do with it—shoot his little self?" This sounded like Hannigan, the assistant bookkeeper.

It was lunch hour in the office of the Grey & Baker Foundry Company. Mr. Cady, returning somewhat earlier than usual and treading lightly, as was his wont, had paused at the door of the record-room, arrested by this conversation which referred unmistakably to himself.

"Nope, it's just for purposes of defense," chuckled the bill-clerk. "He's going to protect the pay-roll money with the last dr-r-rop of his life-blood. If a robber appears, it'll be a case of *bang—bang!* Then a hurry-up call for the coroner."

The voices blended in a laugh that jarred the soul of the listener at the half-open door. The mild brown eyes behind his spectacles blazed for a moment. He had an impulse to stalk into the record-room and threaten the jeering young men with instant discharge. Mr. Cady was office manager for the company, as well as bookkeeper and paymaster, and his threat would carry weight.

The treachery of the thing was what

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hurt. When Doak was in his office that morning he had seemed much impressed by the pistol, had said that it was a good thing to have, in view of the crime wave that was sweeping Millville, had even suggested dire possibilities that had not occurred to Mr. Cady. And now. . . .

"I threw a peach of a scare into him," went on the bill-clerk's nasal voice. "I asked him what he'd do if the 'bomb brigand' came in and threatened to blow up the office if he didn't pass over the pay-roll coin. You know he robbed the Grafton Steel Products Company that way last week—walked into the secretary's office with a square package in his hand, raised it above his head and told Blaney, the secretary, to come across with a thousand bucks or he'd drop the package and blow 'em all to smithereens.

"Blaney pulled a gun, and the fellow told him to go ahead and shoot, that he was a desperate man and wanted to die unless he got the thousand—only if he shot him the result would be just the same. When he fell the bomb would explode, you see, and they'd all go up. So Blaney weakened and came across, and the brigand walked out carrying the package with him. He left it just outside the building, though, and when they opened it up down at the police station they found it was an honest-to-goodness bomb. There was enough dynamite in the package to have wrecked the whole place."

"What'd old Cady say to that?"

"He didn't know what to say. He was scared stiff. I pointed out that his pistol wouldn't help him because he wouldn't dare use it, and he agreed with me. He wanted to know if I thought there was any danger of the fellow trying the same trick again; and when I told him I thought nothing was more likely he darned near fainted. Old Cady has got about as much nerve as a cotton-tail rabbit. He *looks* like one, by gum!"

Mr. Cady swallowed hard and the glare died out of his eyes. He was a plump little man, very neatly dressed in a suit of mixed gray and brown. His face sloped forward to a stubby, twitching nose, and the mustache beneath was sparse and bristly. It must be admitted that the bill-clerk's comparison was not altogether inept. Still, the general effect was far from unpleasant. The rabbit which Mr. Cady resembled would have been an eminently likable member of the species.

"Say, Tommy," drawled Hannigan's voice, "how'd it do to put up a game on him? One of us could slip in and take the cartridges out of his old cannon. Then we could wrap up a brick in a newspaper and write a note saying, 'Give me the pay-roll money or I'll drop this bomb.'

"We could pick up some hobo on the street and pay him two-bits to carry the package in to Cady's office and hand him the note. The minute old Four-eyes read it he would begin shoving money across the desk. Then you and I could jump in, grab the villain, take the brick away from him and tell him to beat it. Grandstand play, see? *We* didn't know it was harmless. It shows up Four-eyes and makes us the niftiest little pair of heroes in Millville. Clever, you say? I thank you."

The bill-clerk whooped with delight.

"Gr-r-reat old head you got, Georgie! It'd work, I'll bet a cookie! We wouldn't even need to spike his gun. Old Cady would forget he had it, and if he remembered, he wouldn't dare shoot. Gosh! I'd like to try it!"

Mr. Cady waited to hear no more. The impulse to wreak vengeance on the pair in the record-room no longer moved him.

Sick at heart, he walked softly across the deserted office and into his own sanctum. It was a little coop, divided from the main office by a flimsy partition.

At one end was the door of the big safe, which set into the wall. Beside that was Mr. Cady's desk, arranged so that the light from one outside window came over his right shoulder. At the other end of the little room was a door which let out into the wide hallway, and in this door was a wicket through which the workmen could be paid off. The room contained one extra chair and a small table on which would be arranged the pay-envelopes, as they were filled with the sums the time-clock's record indicated.

This duty yet remained to be done, but the little bookkeeper did not begin his task at once. He sat down at his desk, and, resting his plump elbows on the blotter-pad, took his head in his hands.

He felt utterly disgusted with himself and with life. Dejectedly he admitted that everything the bill-clerk had said was true. No one knew this so well as Mr. Cady

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himself. He was a coward—always had been.

He smiled somberly at the reflection that if the boys attempted to carry out their absurd plan they would find one part of it impossible of accomplishment. They could not remove the cartridges from his revolver for the sufficient reason that it contained none. He was afraid to touch a loaded firearm.

He was afraid of everything, it seemed to him. For all his twenty-nine years, his childish terrors still clung. He was afraid of the dark; afraid of vague shapes that might jump out at him from behind corners and doors; afraid, yes, horribly afraid of bears. He could not walk past the steel-barred bear-pit in Millville's Zoo without a feeling of absolute horror.

MR. CADY writhed in his chair as he recalled the events of the Sunday before. While walking in the park he had chanced to meet Miss Gertrude Riley, the comely stenographer of the Grey & Baker Foundry Company, for whom he had long nursed a passion that he had never dared express. That day, Spring was in the blood of both. With a courage that surprised even himself, he had responded to the invitation of her soft blue eyes.

They had walked together, they had talked extensively; she had been kinder than he could have hoped, more yielding. Almost had he ventured to ask that he might call.

Then, suddenly playful, she had insisted that he buy her a bag of peanuts to toss to the bears. Mr. Cady had turned pale at the suggestion.

"Stingy!" pouted Miss Riley, so bewitchingly that his fears were swallowed up in a stronger feeling.

He bought the peanuts, and the touch of her hand as he gave them to her so electrified him that they were at the bear-pit before he realized it. There the sight of the huge bodies and snapping jaws had sickened him. He begged her to come away, but she only smiled and continued to toss the nuts to the appreciative brutes below.

"I b'lieve you're afraid of my darling little pets," she teased him. And the expression on Mr. Cady's ghastly face had answered her.

"Why, you really *are* afraid!" she murmured, almost under her breath.

She took his arm in a manner which seemed ostentatiously protective, though still comforting, and they walked silently away.

The day was spoiled for Mr. Cady; the holiday mood was gone. He felt that she despised him, and he could not meet her eyes. He did not ask that he might call. He was gloomy and preoccupied, as was she, and they soon parted.

At the office on the following day and the days succeeding, their relations had been formal, as before, but with an added stiffness that Mr. Cady quite well understood. He had betrayed his weakness before the one person for whose opinion he really cared, and the hope he had formerly cherished of one day winning her favor was forever stilled.

Mr. Cady sighed as he thought of these things, for an hour awaited him which in weeks gone by had been fraught with delightful thrills, but which now promised only pain. It was Miss Riley's duty to enclose in the pay-envelopes the little piles of bills and silver that his own trained fingers counted out. He looked at his watch. The time was one-fifteen. Miss Riley would be at her typewriter.

Wearily Mr. Cady rose and lifted the table to a position convenient to his own desk chair, and drew up the other chair for Miss Riley's use. He placed on the table a shoe-box filled with pay envelopes, each bearing the name of a workman and the amount due him. Then he opened the safe, brought forth his cash-box, and hesitated with his finger hovering over two buttons on his desk.

Should he call for Miss Riley to assist him, or would it not be better to break Hannigan in on this job? The latter would be the easier way. But no! Mr. Cady had a certain moral courage, even though lacking in the physical variety. He refused to permit his feelings to interfere with the office routine, so he pressed the button which summoned the girl of his dreams.

He piled the bills and silver on the table and they set to work, she calling the amounts written on the envelopes under each name, he counting out the sum swiftly and passing it over to be enclosed. They exchanged no words beyond the requirements of their task. Both were subdued and almost furtive in their manner, nor did their eyes meet. It seemed to Mr. Cady

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that the girl studied his face at times, but he could not bring himself to look at her. His lips compressed, his face flushed, he bent doggedly to the work at hand, longing for the moment when it would be finished.

THEY had progressed as far as the names beginning with "N", when a slight sound in the hallway attracted the little bookkeeper's attention. Looking up suddenly he saw a face regarding him through the wicket above Miss Riley's head.

The face was not so attractive as the one beneath. It was that of a very dirty man with a matted black beard and flaming, bloodshot eyes. Even across the several yards which intervened, the reek of stale liquor was oppressively prominent.

Almost as he saw it the face disappeared, and Mr. Cady heard the murmur of voices at the railing gate. The vague uneasiness which he had felt, at once disappeared. No doubt this was some workman in search of a job, who had not known that the Superintendent's office in the foundry building was the proper place to apply.

He glanced down and his gaze lingered on Miss Riley's bowed golden head. An expression of hopeless longing came over his face.

She despised him, of course. How could she help it? He must quit his job and go away somewhere, anywhere. . . .

She raised her head, and for the first time since that fateful Sunday their eyes met. She smiled at him. She spoke magical words of comfort.

"I like—this job," she said.

The heart of Mr. Cady beat strong within him. Spring was in the air again. He felt strangely buoyant and uplifted. He smiled back.

"I'm glad," he said.

Doesn't sound like much, perhaps, but volumes were packed into those two hesitant little speeches. They leaned forward slightly, breathless, absorbed, smiling into each other's eyes.

"Hel-l-l-lp! Hel-l-l-lp!" bellowed the voice of Hannigan in the next room. "Ye-e-eow! Don't drop it!"

"In there he is—in there!" shrieked another voice, presumably that of Doak.

There was a sound of running feet, and Mr. Cady tore his gaze from the grip of Miss Riley's blue orbs in time to see the bearded and odoriferous stranger plunge through the doorway of the paymaster's office.

He was even less attractive at close range.

A tall man, bloated, dirty beyond description, he towered over the pair at the table, a gigantic figure of evil.

He was breathing hard, his eyes flamed more than ever, and in his right hand he held a newspaper-wrapped package which he raised above his head with a threatening gesture.

"There's ten pounds of dynamite in this!" he roared. "I'm a desperate man and I'm ready to die. Give me a thousand dollars or I'll drop it on the floor and blow us all to glory!"

Miss Riley screamed and tumbled out of her chair. On hands and knees she scrambled to a corner of the room, where she knelt, her arms stretched imploringly to Mr. Cady.

"Save me!" she gasped.

"I'll save you, all right enough," said Mr. Cady.

He was not in the least frightened, but angry to the point of viciousness. To be interrupted at that blissful moment was positively maddening. He would fire both those fool boys before he was an hour older.

"Here, you!" he snapped at the bomb brigand, "drop that!"

The bearded one showed his fangs in a ghastly grin.

"If I do," he snarled, "we'll all be in hell before they have time to heat the pitch. Give me that money, you rabbit-faced boob, or I *will* drop it!"

Mr. Cady had half turned and his hand was groping in the top drawer of his desk. Suddenly he whirled about with a rasping squeak of his swivel chair and thrust the muzzle of a revolver in the stranger's stomach.

"Drop it, I say!" he piped angrily. "Or I'll put a hole in you. I'll give you till I count ten, and I'll count fast. One, two, three, four——"

"But if I drop it we'll all be dead!" howled the stranger, bending forward in an effort to avoid the menace at his midsection. "I dassent drop it!"

"Put it down easy, then. Lay it on the table," sniffed Mr. Cady skeptically. "Five, six, seven, eight, nine——"

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BEFORE the tenth count the package was on the table. Mr. Cady stared at his uninvited guest with bitter dislike.

"Hannigan! Doak!" he called. "Why don't you play out the rest of the game? Come in here and grab this stinking friend of yours and make heroes of yourselves."

All the while he kept the muzzle of his empty pistol in close proximity to the other's bloated abdomen.

Neither the bill-clerk nor the assistant bookkeeper made any answer. They could not be blamed for that, as they did not hear the summons. They were, as they afterward admitted, lying on the floor of the record-room with their fingers in their ears.

However, help was at hand. Giant Jeff Grey, the young president of the company, six feet four inches in height, two hundred and forty pounds in weight, and always in training, charged into the room and gripped the stranger firmly by either arm.

"Great work, Cady!" he shouted. "You're a hero, by Gad! You've caught the bomb brigand!"

"Seems so," said Mr. Cady in a bored tone. He wished they would get out of there. He wanted to resume his silent communion with Miss Riley.

"It's all right—Gertrude," he assured the girl, boldly calling her by her given name for the first time. "You can come back to your chair now."

Miss Riley pointed a trembling finger at the package which still lay on the table.

"I'm—I'm afraid of that!" she gasped. "I daren't go past it."

Mr. Cady smiled at her lovingly, tolerantly, as a brave man may smile at the fears of more timid creatures.

"Oh, that?" he said. "Why, I'll get rid of *that* for you."

He picked up the package, balanced it in his hand for a moment, and made a move as if to toss it in the air. There was a scream, a yell and a groan, and Mr. Cady stayed his hand. He glanced at the others: first at Gertrude, who was watching him with open admiration, then at Mr. Grey and his prisoner.

"Cut out the comedy, son," ordered the president. "Our friend here fainted when you began fooling with that package."

It was true. The hairy and odoriferous one had slumped forward to his knees, where he was held by the mighty grip of his captor. His face was white under the grime, and his eyes rolled upward like a dead man's.

Mr. Cady's smile became a little sickly. A strange, prickling chill ran up the arm that held the package. But his step was firm as he walked to the window and looked out. Beneath him, and a dozen yards away, was a sand pit, perhaps fifty feet square and twenty feet deep.

With a careful swing Mr. Cady cast the package from him. His aim was true. Immediately there was an explosion like that of a forty-two-centimeter gun, and the sand-pit erupted like Mt. Lassen in action.

"Great fathers!" gasped Mr. Grey. "That charge, exploded in here, would have torn us all to shreds and made kindling-wood of the office! I sha'n't forget the way you've acted, Cady. It's worth something to this company to have as nervy a man as you in charge of the office. Well, I see the noise has revived our friend. I'll take him out now."

MR. CADY and Miss Riley were alone. She gazed on him with shining eyes.

"I think—" she said—"I think you are the bravest man in the whole world."

Then Mr. Cady did the bravest, most decisive thing of his career. He was a little white and shaky, but he did not falter.

He walked boldly up to Gertrude Riley, slipped one arm around her plump waist, tipped up her chin with the other hand, and kissed her squarely on the mouth.

"There are times," he said happily, "when any man is brave."

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PETERSON and FORSEILLE (NOT INC.)

by Hugh S. Fullerton

Author of "Ole Lekker's Ride," "Stolen Signals," etc.

NELS PETERSON and Henri Forseille are fishermen. In Summer they take in their nets the whitefish and trout that run in across the bars that lie ridge after ridge between the depths of the wide bay between Point Betsie and Sleeping Bear Point. In Winter their shacks are the black dots that you may see far out upon the ice of Lake Michigan, if you climb the dunes that guard the land of the lower peninsula from the storms that sweep down from the straits. Their fish houses, shambling structures of driftwood and planks, stand close by the water's edge on the shore of Little Betsie Lake.

Rudely lettered upon a plank nailed to the side of one of the fish houses is a sign: "Peterson and Forseille," and, close by it, rubbing uneasily against the battered piling of the dock lies the *Viking*, a fishing-tug which is very dirty save that its engines are bright and shining. There is a story connected with the firm—the story of how a partnership was destroyed and then resumed.

The firm of Peterson and Forseille had been formed in the days when the whitefish ran in great shoals, and the trout were so plentiful that only the choicest were taken from the nets. In those days they could catch as many fish at one haul of a net as the partners now can catch in the eight miles of meshed string that they stretch across the bay. The cause of the dissolution of the partnership is now Mrs. Henri Forseille, and she also was the cause of the resumption of the partnership.

Nels Peterson was one of the earliest of the fishermen in the bay, and later he took Henri Forseille to be his partner because he needed an assistant. Nels was a big, blond, powerful fellow, very quiet, and Henri was a slender, graceful, quick-moving French Canadian who was inclined to be noisy and talkative when he drank, which was whenever he had money and was on land.

Nels permitted no drinking when they were on the boats. Nels feared the lake because he knew water and its power; Henri feared nothing, not even the lake, perhaps because he did not know.

Annie McIntyre was, at that time, a stewardess on one of the big lake steamers, which is the equivalent to chambermaid on land. She was pretty, in spite of rather blotchy freckles, and she was plump and always laughing and she loved to flirt with the petty officers and, it was whispered, even with captains and mates.

Annie did not intend to devote her life to performing the duties of a marine chambermaid, and eventually she saved enough

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money and established the first restaurant the town ever had boasted. Presiding in white apron and black gown behind her little counter, with a little mat of white fastened upon the top of her light hair, Annie extended her flirtations, or rather transferred them, from the non-paying brass buttons of the boat officers to the fishermen, the town boys, the country boys and other cash customers, especially to the fishermen, for when the catch was big they had money and spent it lavishly.

Nels had seen Annie at such times as the big boat warped into the dock in Little Betsie Lake, and she leaned over the rail and sprinkled smiles upon whatever male persons lifted their eyes. Only Nels never had dared lift his eyes, but watched her through the meshes while he was mending nets.

Her hair, which had been brown, tinged with red, had faded in the winds and suns of the lakes to light blondness and, seeing her from afar, Nels had thought she was from his country, and perhaps pictured her amid the hills of Sweden. Nels did not know that his partner, Henri, who was dark and whose white teeth gleamed as he smiled, and who had an easy way with women, also had watched Annie, and not only had dared lift his eyes to meet her smiles but had spoken and walked with her.

When Annie first quit the boats and came to establish her little restaurant, Nels spent one week trying to summon up courage enough to eat dinner there. The preliminaries included the purchase of a new suit of clothes, the first he had thought necessary in several years, a hair-cut and a lot of entirely useless excuses uttered to Henri.

After that meal, which it must be confessed was a bad one, he went to the restaurant frequently instead of remaining at the shack and eating the fresh-caught whitefish. Henri broiled whitefish marvelously in a flat basket of plaited wire which he held over the wood coals, occasionally rubbing fresh melted butter over the browning fish. Henri, who went often to the restaurant but seldom spent money, called Nels a fool for paying money for tough beef, and, as subsequent events seemed to prove, Henri was right.

IN THE Fall Nels asked Annie to marry him. She held a napkin to her mouth to hide the laughter and fled to the kitchen. Nels, not understanding women, construed this to mean a refusal of his offer, and for several weeks gloomily munched Henri's whitefish, while Henri, after eating, strolled past the restaurant, flashed his white teeth and, when Annie closed the restaurant, they went walking together—and he made no mention of marriage. Then one day Annie smiled alluringly upon Nels, and he returned to worship and to eat tough flank steak.

At Christmas time Nels got drunk—gloriously, ecstatically drunk—and proclaimed that Annie had promised to marry him. Trouble came with Spring to the Straits. Nels had fished as never before, had remained upon the ice so long that when the Spring thaw came he had been on a floe when it drifted out into the lake.

A lucky shift of the wind blew the floe back. Nels made his way over the wind-heaped shore ice, and learned that during his absence Henri had been paying attention to Annie, and that Annie, instead of mourning him, had been smiling upon his partner. But, when he returned, Annie smiled upon him and said nothing until the ice had gone and the water was blue again. Then one evening, seeking Annie after the restaurant had closed, he learned she had gone walking with Henri.

At daybreak, when they were loading nets and preparing to go out in the *Viking* to bring in nets and fish, Nels said:

"Ongri, Ay tank you stay avay from my gal."

"Your gal?" said Henri, laughing. "Annie him whole —— town's gal."

After Nels had gone in the tug, taking with him only the boy, other fishermen found Henri terribly mauled and manhandled in the shack, carried him to the doctor's office, and within a week he was able to walk.

"Ongri, he ban my pardner no more," said Nels simply. "Ay tank he stay avay from my gal now."

Henri did stay away from Annie, at least while Nels was ashore and, fearing to go to Nels and ask a settlement, he sought a lawyer, who brought suit for a half interest in the fishing business, placing the value of the business far above its worth. Nels, when called upon to testify gave simple evidence.

"Yas," he said, "Ongri he ban my pardner."

"You were equal partners in the business were you not?" asked the lawyer.

"Yas, ve ban pardners."

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"Who put in the capital?" inquired Nels's attorney.

Nels denied possessing any such thing as capital, and, after long questioning he grasped the meaning of the query.

"Ay ban own nets and boats," he said. "Ay take Ongri for my pardner."

"Then he owned an equal interest, did he not?"

"Yas, he ban my pardner," persisted Nels.

With the money secured by the judgment against Nels, Henri purchased a small, speedy tug, a set of lines and nets and established a rival fishing business.

"Ay tank I should ban kill him," said Nels simply, after settling the judgment. "Then Ay no ban have pardner to pay."

Instead of rewarding Nels for defending her fair name, Annie turned against him and to Henri. She said angrily that Nels' foolish jealousy had started the townspeople talking about her. When Henri's new tug came over from Green Bay, Annie was one of the first to take a ride in it, and when Nels came through the channel into Little Betsie, he passed the new tug, read the name *Annie* on its bow, and saw Annie's freckled face gazing toward him scornfully. That night Nels went to the shack in which Henri was broiling a fish, closed the door and gave him a terrible beating.

"Ay tank you ban stay avay from my gal now," he said as he left Henri bleeding upon the floor. "Ay tank you no get new boat for this licking."

Nels was mistaken. Henri might have remained away through fear of another beating, but his bruised and battered features aroused sympathy in the heart of Annie, and hatred for Nels. Nels, unsuspecting the meandering of a woman's affections, went to the restaurant to be received as the conqueror. Annie berated him soundly, told him he was a brute and worse, that she cared more for Henri's little finger than she did for his whole body, and that she never wanted to see him again. Nels listened stolidly, and when she had exhausted her vocabulary upon him, he proceeded to Henri's shack and gave him another beating.

Two weeks later water-front society was agog with excitement. Henri and Annie had been married. It was freely predicted in that circle of society that Nels would kill Henri, and Henri, fortified with whisky and armed with a revolver, announced that, if Nels tried to touch him, he would shoot.

At daybreak, as both tugs were preparing to put out to lift the nets, Nels came to Henri's shack. Henri sprang up and drew his weapon, but Nels seized his arm in one great paw, jerked the revolver out of his hand, and then holding him by the shoulder, seized the hand that had held the gun and shook it.

"Annie, she ban tank you better man than Ay am," he said. "She ban —— fool, but you ban treat my gal right or Ay kill you."

After that he paid little attention either to Henri or Annie. He continued to catch fish, Winter and Summer, and on special occasions he got very drunk and slept all day, which is a fisherman's vacation. When Annie's boy was born, he went to Manistee in his tug, brought back drink for the celebration, and a gift for the child.

Then, for two years, he did not speak to or, so far as any one could see, did he notice either of them. One day Henri got drunk and struck Annie. He had been at Manistee for two days, leaving his nets untended, and Annie had scolded. When Nels returned, bringing his day's catch of fish, he heard what Henri had done. He cleaned his fish, iced them, dressed in his Sunday clothing and, going to Henri's house, he dragged Henri from bed and beat him until the neighbors and the marshal arrived. Nels was arrested and fined and, as he paid the fine, he remarked—

"Ay tank Ongri ban leave my gal alone now."

Annie, as may be supposed, hated Nels all the more, proclaiming, if not from the housetops, at least at the back doors, that Nels had shamed her before the entire community.

For three more years the situation continued and the townspeople laughed, because, no matter how much he drank, Henri dared not beat his own wife for fear of Nels's anger. Annie's boy had grown into a sturdy, daring imp who constantly was in or on the water, and who, strangely, was devoted to Nels. The Christmas that Henri Junior was six years old Nels gave him a rowboat that was the envy of every boy in the town.

During that period Henri stretched his nets on the bars that fringe the shore from the inlet at Little Betsie south to the headland above the Herring Lakes. Nels fished

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only on the bars in Sleeping Bear Bay.

Nels prospered, and Henri did not. Nels' catches uniformly were larger. He got better prices because he handled his fish more rapidly and with more care. Not infrequently Henri drank too much and his nets remained untended for a day or more. His trim little tug was dirty and his engines were neglected. His nets were mended carelessly and were wearing out. He still was lifting nets by hand while Nels had installed a gas motor and a lifting drum to handle the nets more rapidly and save the heavy work.

For all the difference Henri blamed his luck, and he decided to shift his fishing-grounds. One morning, having fortified his courage from a bottle, he moved boldly northward on to the shoals that guard Sleeping Bear Bay and set his nets.

The feud that had been smoldering for years threatened to break into flames. The fishermen predicted Nels would maul Henri beyond recognition for invading his fishing preserves. Instead, Nels behaved exactly as if Henri did not exist. If Henri's tug was coming through the channel and met the *Viking*, Nels gave it not an inch of sea room and the *Annie* was compelled to give way to avoid being rammed. Nels drove his tug straight across Henri's nets if they were in his course, and several times when Henri and the boy who helped him were lifting nets, they were forced to abandon the work and flee to escape being run down by the heavier tug.

IN SEPTEMBER, a month before such storms are due, there came a wild gale out of the northwest—a gale that screamed between the Manitous, roared over the dunes and drove the heavy seas inward over the bars. Nels had gone in his tug at four in the morning to lift nets and set the fresh ones. His tug was working along the outer bar two miles off the Point Betsie light when the gale struck.

The wind, which had been light and shifting, came swooping down out of the Straits filled with the cold of advancing Winter. Where the jutting sand mountains guard the entrance of the bay the wind was caught as in a funnel, between Sleeping Bear and Point Betsie, and, pressed closer between the hills, it gathered force. The waves, driven by the weight of the deep waters and the wind, roared over the series of bars and, breaking upon the packed sands, tossed in a succession of surfs toward the beach. On such a day Sleeping Bear Bay became a maelstrom.

The *Viking*, with her double battery of gas engines, was holding her nose up to the rushing surf at the outer bar. Ole, the giant Swede who worked for Nels, was performing a miracle. Holding the boat quartering across the heavy seas, he was sending it riding up the rollers and permitting the force of the breaking water to shift the tug sideways along the line of nets, using the engines merely to hold the boat steady and barely maintaining steerage speed. In the stern, sheltered behind a V of heavy timbers, the boy was running the smaller gas engine that turned the big metal drum and lifted and reeled in the nets.

Leaning far out, so that at times the breakers seemed to crash almost upon his head, Nels was guiding the net, drawing the enmeshed whitefish from the web and throwing them upon the ever-increasing pile of flopping, glistening living silver in the bottom of the boat. There was no time to use the boxes. The catch was heavy and there was man's work to be done against sea and wind.

"Ay gar, she run forty boxes," said Nels as a breaker snapped like a whiplash near his face and he drew back to avoid the stinging water.

With bloody hands he dragged two whitefish from the meshes and, standing erect, looked toward the northwest.

"Ay tank we get all the nets up," he said. "Maybe we run for it soon, eh, Ole?"

"Ay tank we best run now, maybe," said Ole, unperturbed. "Ongri, he ban quit liftin'. He ban run."

"Ongri ban —— fool," said Nels as he resumed his work. "Ongri got good tug but no care for his engine. Some day, engine, she quit!"

He made a comprehensive gesture that left little doubt as to what the fate of Henri would be if his engines broke down in such a sea. A seventh wave shattered itself under the bow and hissed past, spraying Nels with its flying spindrift. He straightened, wiped the water from his eyes and, holding a fish in each hand, gazed across the torment of waters toward where the *Annie* was struggling along the outer bar toward the open lake.

To reach the inlet and the protecting wings of the breakwater the *Annie* would

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have to round the big, jutting sand-dune that guards the southern entrance to the bay, and in front of that dune the shallow water extends far out into the lake, a V-shaped stretch of foaming water marking the shallows.

"Ongri he ban —— fool," said Nels without emotion as he resumed jerking fish out of the meshes of the net. "He ban hav von —— of a time ven he try to come about."

He and Ole knew that the *Annie* either could not make headway enough against the wind and sea to stand straight out into the lake, or that Henri was ignorant of the danger of attempting to come about in shallow water with such a sea running, and was holding too close to the bars.

The *Viking*, tossing like a cork upon the racing seas, held steadily into the teeth of the gale. Ole was using the pull of the lifting engine on the nets to drag the tug sideways. The waves, breaking under her bow quartering, strove to throw the little vessel sideways into the trough of the sea, but each time Ole threw the wheel over and forced the weight of the nets to pull the stern and hold the boat up, and each wave sent the *Viking* sliding sideways off its windward side.

It was dangerous work, calling for strength and perfect timing of the break of each wave, but Ole appeared unconcerned. Occasionally he glanced across the foaming seas toward the *Annie*. In the lulls between violent gusts of wind the throbbing of the engines of the *Annie* came to them faintly. The *Annie* had fought her way outward and, with her nose still pointing to the wind, she was working along just outside the white water, preparing to come about quickly when past the headland and run before the wind down the dune-battlemented coast to the shelter of the piers.

"Ay tank Ongri ban havin' engine trouble," said Ole impassively, as he threw his weight upon the wheel and shifted the tug just in time to escape the smashing crest of a big roller.

"Ongri's engines ban stop, Ongri ban gone," said Nels, without glancing up.

"Yas, they ban stop," said Ole calmly. "She ban fall in trough. Pretty soon she smash on bar."

"She ban roll over before she smash on bar," said Nels argumentatively. "She too light for sea lak this."

The *Viking* was working outward, crawfish-like. She was three-quarters of a mile offshore and perhaps half a mile from where the *Annie* was floundering as the seas swept her sideways and helpless toward the outer bar. The *Viking* was closer in shore, as the *Annie* had worked her way outward to pass outside the shallower water off the point.

Nels straightened himself, and, holding a fish in each hand, looked across the water to where the hull of the *Annie* tossed. He saw a flash of the white upper-works, the black of the hull, and knew the tug had rolled completely over.

"Ongri he ban gone," he said, as if wondering that it should happen. Suddenly he sprang across the boat.

"Ole, you hold her nose up!" he shouted. "Run slow—let her drift backward. Gus, you ban keep drum runnin' lak devil."

THE lifting engine spluttered more rapidly. The drum upon which the net was being reeled groaned under the strain. The pull of the net helped hold the nose of the boat up and it drifted sideways and backward.

"Ongri he ban drift into the net!" cried Nels. "We catch him."

He was watching the face of the waters and with his great hands he dragged and lifted at the nets, guiding them upon the drum. His plan was plain. The net they were lifting was stretched on the bar running parallel to the southern shore of the bay. The northwest gale would drive the bodies of the *Annie's* crew straight toward the net if they remained near enough the surface.

Nels was yelling orders in his broken English, hauling the net with main strength to hasten the work of the drum. Occasionally he swore gutturally as he hurled a fish into the boat to prevent it from being drawn into the drum. He cared nothing for whitefish. He was fishing for men.

At times the *Viking* fell away into the trough so quickly it seemed as if she must turn sideways and be swamped, and at each time Ole drove his engines hard for an instant and regained his lost steerageway. At times, too, only his great strength held the boat up to the smothering seas. The tug had drifted past the first wild windrow of water that marks the first shallows and was struggling in the smother of water that extends for half a mile off Point Betsie.

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Men were racing along the beach at the point and the siren of the life-saving station was screaming. Presently the white power-boat of the life-savers was rushed through the inner surf, thrown back, rushed forward again and was tossing toward the *Viking*.

"Ay gar, we cotch vun!" yelled Nels.

He dragged at the net, hand over hand exerting his giant's strength as if to drag the hundreds of yards of wet mesh clear of the water at one haul. An instant later he threw himself half over the rail, arms extended downward. He kicked, struggled and heaved himself upward and inboard, dragging something from the water.

"We got vun!" he cried, and, lifting the unconscious figure of the boy who had been Henri's mate, he carried it forward, ripping the net to free it from the grasp of the drowning boy.

"He ban live!" he exclaimed, as he ran back to straighten the net and start it winding upon the drum again.

"Ay vunder where Ongri is?" he said, dragging at the net and peering out into the rushing waters.

The *Viking* had been driven back past the second bar and was tossing like driftwood in the rollers. Twice, three times she crashed down and shivered from stem to stern as if her keel had struck upon the sand. On the next bar, only a short distance from them, the water when calm was not more than eight feet deep, and if the *Viking* struck that in the trough of the sea, she would burst open and break to pieces.

Ole was driving the engines harder, but even with the increased power she barely was holding her own. Not more than a hundred feet of the net remained to be lifted, and the *Viking* was moving crabwise along that stretch. Nels was pulling at the net as if to aid the drum in hauling the boat. He was leaning far over the side, shaking his big head as the waves broke over it.

When the boat rolled on that side, his arms and shoulders were buried in the water and the waves smashed down upon his head and back. Suddenly he straightened, lifting the net and, with braced feet, he dragged at it.

"Ay tank we got him!" he screamed over the roar of the surf.

The man was doing the work of the engine, dragging the net inboard before the pull of the engine was exerted upon it. Then Nels, grasping the top cork line of the net with both hands, leaped overboard. The wave caught him and smashed his body against the side of the boat but, hand over hand, clutching the rope and swimming, he dragged himself through the surf. Twenty yards from the boat he had seen a black object swirl on a breaker and disappear.

Ole understood. He threw the wheel sharply over, and the tug, caught broadside for an instant, was tossed in pursuit of its swimming captain. Like a flash Ole jerked the wheel sharply in the opposite direction and, before the next wave could crash down upon the *Viking* and swamp her, he had swung her bow straight into the wave. She dived wildly, shook the water off and rode high.

Twice more Ole repeated the desperate maneuver, forcing the tug nearer Nels. Nels had reached the floating object. With one hand he grasped it, while with the other he clutched the rope and strove to hold it while being drawn to the side of the vessel. The maneuvers of Ole slackened the strain upon the net for an instant and Nels and his burden were swept toward the third bar.

When the tug righted itself for the third time the dragging weight on the net stopped the drum. The lifting engine jarred and stopped. Nels and his burden disappeared. An instant later the tow-colored head of Nels appeared above the foam. Both hands were grasping the net, and he was dragging himself by main strength along it toward the tug which was approaching him by drunken sidewise lurches.

The big white surf-boat from the life-saving station was within a hundred yards. Nels was swept astern, the tug lifted and slapped down upon the water the next time so close it seemed to crash upon him. He disappeared again. An instant later his arm shot up, his hand grasped a rope loop.

The boy leaped to the rail, seized Nels' coat and dragged at it. An instant later Nels heaved himself upward as the boat rolled toward him, got both elbows over the rail and hung, breathless and exhausted. Three times he strove to drag himself into the boat, and finally, aided by the lift of the water, he got his body over the rail, and, with a mighty effort, rolled inboard.

The boy saw that Nels' legs were locked about the body of Henri and, seizing Henri's

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coat, the boy clung to him while Nels rolled over, seized Henri with both hands and dragged him into the tug.

He stood erect, breathing heavily, and after an instant to regain breath he yelled to Ole:

"Let's gat to —— out of this."

Ole had not waited for the order. The double engines were beating and throbbing at full power, headed straight into the rollers. The boy slashed away the net. For a minute, perhaps longer, the *Viking* fought the seas and seemed drifting backward upon the third bar. Then slowly it gained upon the waves and began to work its way outward over the windrows of breakers.

The life-saving crew watched for a few minutes, then turned the surfboat back toward the station. In the bottom of the tug Nels was working with the unconscious ones he had rescued. Kneeling upon Henri's body, he moved the arms up and down, forcing air into the exhausted lungs.

Half an hour later, Ole, maneuvering daintily, swung the *Viking* between seas, felt her stagger for an instant, then turn and run free before the wind and waves toward the piers and safety. Henri was breathing; the boy was sitting up, whimpering, and Nels had crawled low in the boat to escape the wind, lighted his pipe and was cursing over the loss of a net and of many whitefish.

That evening Annie met Nels in front of the post-office. She had heard of the wreck of the *Annie* two hours before Nels returned, bringing the rescued ones, and had mourned as a widow. She tried to thank Nels, who listened unmoved.

"Ay tank Ay ban have to take Ongri back to be pardner," he said when she ceased speaking. "He ban too big —— fool to vork alone."

Annie sobbed. Her eyes were red already and her freckles showed more plainly than ever when she wept. Nels eyed her uneasily.

"Yas," he said. "Ay make him pardner again. He too big —— fool to mak living for my gal by himself."

So the firm name is Peterson & Forseille, and Nels says Annie's boy shall inherit it.

THE SQUARE PEG

by **GORDON SEAGROVE**

FROM my office-cell I saw you towing slowly down the sound
With your dirty bilges burdened with a cargo outward bound,
And I mark the day you claimed me, when I sweated in your waist,
When I munched your wormy biscuit with a curse between each taste.
Too, I mark the kicks and cuffings at the Dutchman's horny hands
While the booming seas we battled off the shores of distant lands.
So I cursed you and reviled you—you and all your brutal ken,
And I'd given every dollar to be free of you again.

Now I'm educated—risen—and my hands are soft and white.
In the days I drive at figures, but when comes the city's night,
Then I see the blowy reaches of the tireless, tossing sea,
And I feel the west wind calling as it used to call to me;
In my dreams I hear the block-songs, and I skip on skys'l yard
With the vivid thrill of knowing that grim death may play his card.
Yes, I cursed you and reviled you, but my thoughts have changed since then,
And I'd give my bottom dollar just to tread your decks again.

For I'm tired of men and cities, and I think they're tired of me;
And my eyes cry out for surcease from the people that they see—
Men with pallid, servile manners, men with small ambitions vain,
And the ceaseless tide of women with their faces marked by pain.
And I feel my fingers itching for the bite of icy tacks,
For the rough-and-tumble fighting and the sheets that broke men's backs.
You're a rolling rotten hooker, and your peak's a vermin pen,
But I'd give my bottom dollar just to tread your decks again.

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PARADISE BEND

A FOUR-PART STORY—CONCLUSION

by William Patterson White

Author of "That Which is Written," "A Pair of Queens," etc.

SYNOPSIS—The famous Lazy River country is held by three great ranches, the Cross-in-a-box, the Bar-S, and the 88. *Tom Loudon*, cowpuncher, and *Sam Blakely*, manager of 88, are rivals for the affection of *Kate Saltoun*, whose black eyes have flashed favor at a half-dozen men. She is daughter of *John Saltoun*, owner of Bar-S, *Loudon's* employer. *Loudon* has reason to believe *Blakely's* outfit is stealing Bar-S cattle. *Saltoun* will not believe this; *Kate* favors *Blakely*, and *Blakely* frames up proof that *Loudon* is rustling 88 cows. This proof falls flat, but in a quarrel *Loudon* wounds *Blakely* and is forced to leave Bar-S.

On his way to Paradise Bend *Loudon* stops at Farewell, *Blakely's* town, where he threatens *Sheriff Block*, an adherent of 88, with exposure. Whereupon he finds a warm friend in *Captain Burr*, a tin-pedler from "the Bend." The Captain asks *Loudon* to make the *Burr* home his headquarters till he finds a job.

Loudon rides into Paradise Bend alone. A stranger, *Pete O'Leary*, arouses *Loudon's* suspicions at once. *Mrs. Burr* and her daughter *Dorothy* give *Loudon* a hearty welcome. Old *Scotty Mackenzie*, a friend ranch-owner of the *Burrs*, hires *Loudon*. On the trail to the ranch *Mackenzie* suddenly notices an 88 brand on *Loudon's* horse. At the point of a gun he forces a promise from *Loudon* to go on to the ranch alone. *Loudon*, bewildered, dares not look back as he rides away.

Loudon is welcomed at the Flying M ranch. *Mackenzie* returns and admits his mistake. He had thought *Loudon* sent by *Blakely*, to pay an old score. *Loudon* is warned by *Telescope Laguerre*, a bunk-house friend, to look out for *O'Leary*. They agree *O'Leary* is a secret agent of 88.

Rufe Cutting, Flying M cook, attempts to kill *Loudon*, is foiled, and leaves the ranch, threatening to get *Loudon* later. *Loudon* follows to the Bend, to meet *Mackenzie*. He is arrested by the Marshal, for *Sheriff Block* has arrived from Farewell. The charge is horse-stealing and cattle-rustling. *Mrs. Burr* suddenly intercedes in *Loudon's* favor. *Captain Burr* and *Mackenzie* arrive and *Sheriff Block* is driven from the Bend.

Cutting steals *Loudon's* pet horse, *Ranger*, *Mackenzie* and *Loudon* follow him. At Rocket *Loudon* meets *Kate Saltoun*. Her friendly advances surprise and discomfit him. Giving up the hunt for *Cutting*, he returns to the Bend and again meets *Kate*, who is visiting the wife of *Jim Mace*, *Loudon's* friend.

Loudon and *Telescope Laguerre* plan soon to start out and "get" the 88 gang. *Laguerre* believes in the same outfit he will find the man who, years before, robbed him of his wife. That night, they attend a dance which is broken up suddenly when a prospector arrives from Hatchet Creek with an appeal to save his partners from Indians.

Separating from the posse which rides to the rescue, *Loudon* and *Telescope* discover that the prospector has slipped away and is riding stolen *Ranger*. *Loudon* sprains his ankle in the pursuit. Then the posse learns the whole thing is a ruse to lure them from the Bend.

Upon their return they find *Scotty Mackenzie* has been wounded and a hundred of his horses stolen. *Loudon* is laid up at the *Burr* house. He knows it was *O'Leary* who started the dance; *Kate Saltoun* finds out for him that *O'Leary* writes to a man named *Archer* in Marysville; *Kate* also tells *Loudon* she loves him, but *Loudon* will not acknowledge he cares.

Back at *Scotty's* ranch *Loudon* quickly forms a plan to round up the 88 gang. He and *Telescope* go to Farewell. While there the Sheriff of Sunset, bringing a warrant to arrest *Rufe Cutting* for the murder of a ranch-owner, enemy of *Blakely* and 88, is lured into a poker game and shot in the back by an 88 cowboy. *Loudon* suspects *Sheriff Block* also. Therefore *Loudon* and *Telescope* surprise *Block* and ten adherents of 88 in *Block's* house. With a Mexican whip *Loudon* lashes from *Block* information that *Rufe Cutting*, riding *Loudon's* stolen horse *Ranger*, has gone south.

Loudon hurries to Marysville, enrolling the support of several friendly ranchmen on the way, and promising them they will soon have a chance to help clean up *Blakely*, *Block* and 88. At Marysville *Loudon* learns that *Archer*, a dance-hall owner, still has in his corral a few of *Scotty's* stolen horses, with their brands blotted, and that *Archer* often is gone for weeks, sometimes returning from the direction of the railroad.

Drawn into a poker game by *Archer* and his friend, "*Skinny*" *Maxson*, *Loudon* suspects treachery, remembering the Sheriff of Sunset. So he shoots *Maxson* in the arm for crooked dealing. *Maxson* leaves the saloon. Soon his brother *Luke* comes gunning for *Loudon*, but is brought up standing. Then *Judge Allison* interferes, suggesting a street duel as a fair settlement of the dispute. *Loudon* rushes up-stairs for his rifle. *Luke Maxson* takes his appointed place down-street.

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THE RAILROAD CORRAL

LOUDON stepped out into the street. Laguerre stationed himself on the sidewalk twenty yards in Loudon's rear. Every window and doorway giving a view of the scene of hostilities was crowded with observers. On the sidewalk, fifty yards from the hotel, stood Judge Allison, watch in hand.

Loudon stood, one leg thrust slightly forward, his eyes on the dance-hall door, and his cocked rifle in the hollow of his left arm.

Not for an instant did he fear the outcome. His self-confidence was supreme. Oddly enough, his mind refused to dwell on the impending duel.

He saw nothing, thought of nothing, save trivial objects till Luke Maxson stepped out of the dance-hall doorway.

Then a prickling twitched the skin between Loudon's shoulders, and he experienced a curious species of exhilaration. It reminded him of a long-ago evening in Fort Worth when he had drunk a glass of champagne.

The exhilaration vanished in a breath. Remained a calculating coldness and the pleasing knowledge that Luke Maxson was still excited.

Bang! The judge's six-shooter spoke. The upper half of Maxson's figure was hidden by a cloud of smoke.

Loudon worked his Winchester so rapidly that the reports sounded like the roll of an alarm-clock. At his tenth shot, simultaneously with a blow on his left foot that jarred his leg to the knee, he saw Luke Maxson drop his rifle and fall forward on his hands and knees.

Then Maxson jerked his body sidewise and sat up, his back toward Loudon, his hands clutching his legs.

Loudon lowered the hammer of his Winchester and gazed down at his numbed foot. Most of the high heel of his boot had been torn away. Which was the sole result of his opponent's marksmanship. Walking with a decided list to port he unhurriedly crossed to the hotel.

"Gimme a drink!" he called to the bartender. "An' have one yoreself."

"Forgeet me, huh?" chuckled Laguerre, hard on his friend's heels. "Mak' eet t'ree, meestair."

"Say, Tom," Laguerre said, when they were alone. "Why deed you tell me to shut up, huh?"

"Why, don't ye see, Telescope?" replied Loudon. "Here's Bill Archer a heap suspicious of us already. He's guessed we're from the Bend, but if we don't recognize Luke Maxson he won't know what to think. Anyway, I'm gamblin' he won't canter right off an' blat out to the 88 that two fellahs are on their trail. Instead o' doin' that it's likely he'll trail us when we pull our freight, an' try to make sure just what our game is. It's our job to keep him puzzled till everythin's cinched. Then he can do what he likes. It won't make a bit of difference."

"You are right," nodded Laguerre. "You t'ink sleecker dan me dees tam. But why you not keel de man, huh?"

"'Cause, dead an' buried he can't be identified. Gripped up in bed he'll make a fine Exhibit A for our outfit."

"You was tak' a beeg chance."

"Oh, not so big. He was mad when he came into the saloon, an' I made him a heap madder before I got through talkin' to him. Ye can't shoot good when yo're mad."

And Loudon grinned at Laguerre.

"You old sun-of-a-gun!" said his friend admiringly.

THAT hearty soul, Judge Allison, brought the news half-an-hour after the shooting that Luke Maxson was far from being badly wounded. There were, it seemed, three bullets in Luke's right leg and two in his left. And the left leg was broken.

At this last, Loudon brightened visibly. He had feared that his adversary had merely sustained flesh wounds. A broken leg, however, would confine the amiable Luke to his bed for a period of weeks, which, for the proper furtherance of Loudon's plans, was greatly to be desired.

Loudon began to fear for the safety of Judge Allison. Marysville was not apt to take kindly the judge's rather open espousal of the stranger's cause. And Loudon liked Judge Allison. He felt that the judge was honest; that he had been duped by Block and Archer and the others of their ilk; that, his eyes once opened to the true state of affairs, the judge would not hesitate to

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show the malefactors the error of their ways.

In time Loudon intended to take the judge into his confidence, but that time was not yet. In the meantime no evil must come to Judge Allison. Loudon took the judge aside.

"Your Honor," said he, "ain't ye just a little too friendly to me an' my friend? We don't have to live here, but you do."

The judge did not immediately make reply. He put his head on one side and looked at Loudon under his eyebrows.

"In so far as I may," said the judge at last, "I do what pleases me. Even so, no man in the possession of his senses performs any act without good reason. Regarding my reason for what little I did, I can at present say, '*Cherchez la femme.*' Ah, here comes the stage! I must go to the post-office. Come to my office in about fifteen minutes, Mr. Franklin, and remember, '*Cherchez la femme.*' "

Loudon stared in perplexity after the retreating figure.

"*Shershay la fam,*" he repeated. "Now I'd sure like to know what that means. *Shershay la fam.* Don't sound like Injun talk. An' he wants to see me in fifteen minutes, does he? Maybe, now, he'll bear watchin' after all."

At the time appointed Loudon entered the judge's office. The judge, smoking a long cigar, his feet on the table, waved Loudon to a chair. Loudon unobtrusively hitched his six-shooter into easy drawing position as he sat down. He watched the judge like a cat. The judge smiled.

"Friend," he said, "you may relax. It's quite too hot to look for trouble where none is. My intentions are of the friendliest. Quite recently there have come to my ears several important bits of information. Among other interesting facts, I am told that Sheriff Block has sworn in twelve deputies for the purpose of arresting one Thomas Loudon, lately employed by the Bar-S ranch, but working at present for the Flying M in Sunset County.

"The man Loudon is alleged to have committed divers crimes, ranging in their heinousness from rustling and assault with murderous intent, to simple assault and battery. Thomas Loudon is supposed to have returned to the Flying M, but the worthy sheriff has in some manner gained the impression that the fugitive is still within the confines of Fort Creek County. Hence the dozen deputies."

The judge paused. Loudon leaned back in his chair, crossed one leg over the other and rolled a cigarette. He realized now that Judge Allison was unreservedly his friend.

"It is only a question of time," continued the judge, "when a batch of these deputies will ride into Marysville. If Thomas Loudon were in Marysville at present, and if I were in his boots, I should saddle my horse and seek refuge in parts unknown—for a time at least. I understand that Thomas Loudon is taking steps in a certain matter that will, if he is successful, criminally involve large and powerful interests. If Thomas Loudon is a man of parts and wisdom he will take his steps with all speed.

"Evidence is evidence, and the more there is of it, and the stronger it is, and the sooner it is brought forward, the better. For the better information of Thomas Loudon, I will say that, under the laws of this territory, a warrant issued by any judge may be withdrawn by that judge at his discretion. For instance, should Thomas Loudon present evidence tending to discredit the individuals swearing out the warrant against him, said warrant would stand an excellent chance of being immediately annulled. Do I make myself clear?"

"Couldn't be clearer," Loudon said, staring up at the ceiling. "I'll bet Tom Loudon would be a heap grateful to ye if he could 'a' heard what ye had to say."

"Doubtless—doubtless. I trust some day to make the gentleman's acquaintance. As I was saying, these deputies may arrive at any time. I do not believe they will come before tomorrow at the earliest. Yet one can never tell. Parts unknown are the best health resorts on earth at times like these."

"Yo're sure whistlin', Judge. I guess we'll pull our freight this aft'noon or tonight."

When Loudon informed Laguerre in the privacy of their room of what the judge had said, the swarthy man slapped his leg and laughed aloud.

"By Gar!" he exclaimed. "By Gar! Dat ees dam fonny!" Then, in a lower tone, he added, "She sure one good feller. W'at was dose word she say—dose fonny word you not know w'at dey mean?"

"*Shershay la fam.*"

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"*Cherchez la femme*, huh? Dat ees *Français*. Un it mean, 'Fin' de woman.' "

"'Find the woman'! I'd like to know what findin' the woman's got to do with it."

"I dunno. But dat's w'at de word mean, all right. W'at I wan' for know ees how de judge she know so much 'bout you. She issue de warran', un now she not follow eet up. I do not understan', me."

"Me neither. Lend me yore knife, Telescope, will ye? Yores is sharper'n mine, an' I got to cut some leather offen my chaps an' make me a new heel. I'll prob'ly have time to make me a whole new pair o' boots an' a saddle before Johnny an' Chuck drift in. Which they're the slowest pair of bandits livin'. We'll give 'em till daylight tomorrow."

MARYSVILLE, whatever opinions it may have held concerning the shooting affray, did not openly disapprove. No one came forward to take up the quarrel of the Maxson brothers.

As to Archer, he sat alone in front of his dance-hall. Loudon perceived, in the course of a casual stroll, that the man wore his spurs and that two of the horses in the corral were saddled and bridled. He also noted that the five Barred Twin Diamond horses were still in the corral. He dropped in at the judge's office.

"Judge," said Loudon, "it just struck me that somebody might want to buy that sorrel hoss o' yores. Ye see, I've taken quite a fancy to that hoss. I might want to buy him myself some day. Would ye mind hangin' on to him till I come back from where I'm goin'?"

"So that's how the wind blows?" the judge said disgustedly. "I might have known it, too. He was so cheap. Well, Mr. Franklin, you may rest assured that the sorrel horse remains in my possession until your return. Confound it all, I hate to part with him! He's a good horse."

"He's all that. But maybe, now, yore keepin' him could be arranged if you like him so much. I might not want him so bad after all."

"Corruption, corruption!" exclaimed Judge Allison, violently winking his right eye. "Would you bribe the bench, Mr. Franklin? No, not another word, sir. We are drawing a trifle ahead of our subject. Let me impress upon you the necessity for prompt action. I should make my departure before sunset, if I were you."

"Deputies?"

"As to them, I can not say," said he, shaking his head, "but I am of the opinion that Marysville will not be a health resort tonight. The wicked walk in the darkness, you know, and not half-an-hour ago I heard something that makes me quite positive that the said evildoers will endeavor to walk to some purpose this evening. I was on the point of sending you warning when you came in."

"Now that's right friendly of ye, Judge. Me an' my friend won't forget it. But ain't there just some chance o' these here evildoers a-comin' to see you?"

"I have a friend or two here myself. I told you this morning that I stand in no danger. I have had no reason to change my opinion."

"All right, you know best. I guess Telescope an' me'll pull our freight instanter. We won't wait for my friends. When they come would ye mind tellin' 'em we've gone to Damson?"

"I shall be delighted. Who are your friends?"

"Johnny Ramsay o' the Cross-in-a-box an' Chuck Morgan o' the Bar-S."

"'Chuck Morgan.' Well do I know the gentleman. I fined him twenty-five dollars last fall for riding his horse into Billy Wood's saloon, roping the stove and trying to drag it through the doorway."

"That's Chuck all over! But he didn't tell the Bar-S nothin' about a fine."

"The Bar-S! What are you talking about? You're from the southern ranges, and I'd advise you not to forget it."

"I won't again," Loudon grinned. "So long, Judge, an' we're obliged to ye for——"

"For nothing! For nothing! And don't forget that either. Now goodby and good luck."

Loudon and Laguerre, having paid their bill, left the hotel by the back way. A pale little man, one of the dance-hall fiddlers, was flirting with the cook at the kitchen doorway. When the two men appeared, carrying their saddles and rifles, the pale one glided swiftly around the corner of the house.

"See that?" muttered Loudon, cinching up rapidly.

Laguerre nodded.

"—— 'em!" he whispered. "Hope dey follow! By Gar! I do, me!"

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"No use tryin' to slide out past the corral now," said Loudon. "We might as well use Main Street."

They were glad of their decision. They rode into Main Street just in time to see Archer and a companion turning the corner of the dance-hall. The Flying M men headed northward. The other two turned their horses' heads to the south.

Where Main Street became the trail, Loudon and Laguerre swung eastward and loped steadily for several miles. When their shadows were long in front of them they climbed the reverse slope of a little hill.

Picketing their horses below the crest, they lay down behind an outcrop and watched the back trail. Within thirty minutes appeared two dots on a ridge three miles distant.

"Just like wolves, ain't they?" chuckled Loudon, and wriggled backward.

"We weel bushwhack dem here, huh?" growled Laguerre. "Eet ees de good plass. Dey weel pass on our trail not two hundred yard away. We geet dem easy."

"No, not yet, Telescope," said Loudon. "It ain't necessary, anyhow. We'll ride on till it gets dark. Then we'll light a fire an' vamose, an' leave them holdin' the bag."

"Dat ees all right," Laguerre said, "but keelin' ees better. Why not? No one weel know. Un eef dey do, w'at mattair? Dey are de teenhorn. We weel have dat all prove'. I say, keel dem, me."

Unconsciously Laguerre fingered the handle of his skinning-knife. Loudon laughed.

"C'mon," he said. "There'll be enough o' killin' before this job's over."

Grumbling, for to him an ambush was such a ridiculously simple method of disposing of two enemies, Laguerre followed his comrade. They rode till night came on. Then, in the middle of a mile-wide flat, where cottonwoods grew beside a tiny creek, they dismounted and loosened cinches.

Hobbled, their bridles off, the horses grazed. Laguerre, still protesting, made the fire. He built it cunningly, after the Indian manner, with an arrangement of sticks to leeward, so that it would burn slowly and for a long time.

"Dere," said Laguerre, as the flames bit and took hold, "dat weel fool dem. But I t'ink de Winchestair be de bes' t'ing, me."

Loudon laughed as he swung into the saddle. Inwardly he quite agreed with Laguerre in the matter of an ambush. Enemies should be crushed as expeditiously and with as little danger to one's self as possible. Yet Loudon was too humanly normal to practise the doctrine in all its ruthlessness. To do that one must be either a great general or a savage. Laguerre was not abnormal, but he was half Indian, and at times he became wholly one. This was one of the times.

FOR three miles the two men rode in the creek water, then, guided by the stars, they headed southwest. Toward midnight they came upon a well-marked trail. They knew it could be none other than the trail to Blossom, and they turned into it. Under the spell of the horses' steady walk-along Laguerre became reminiscent.

"De ole tam, dey are wit' me now, my frien'," he observed, "but I do not feel varree bad, me. I am on de move. Un soon dere weel be beeg fight. I have been de scout, I have leeve wit' Enjun, I have hunt all t'ings, un I tell you, Tom, dere ees nothin' like huntin' de man. Dat mak' me feel fine.

"By Gar! W'en I was young man een Blackfoot camp, I was go ovair to de Assiniboine, un I run off seex pony un geet two scalp. Dat mak' me beeg man wit' de Blackfoot. Dey say my medicine was good, un eet was good, by Gar! Eet was de Winchestair. De Assiniboine w'at chase me was surprise'. Dey not know de Winchestair den. Deir gun all single-shot."

And Laguerre laughed at this recollection of aboriginal amazement. Loudon made no comment. The laughter died in a grunt. The harsh voice resumed:

"By Gar! I bless de luck dat Scotty sen' me wit' you. I mean for queet un go 'way wit' you like I tol' you, un w'en dem horse-t'ief run off de pony, I know I can not queet. I can not leave Scotty like dat. She ees good frien' to me. But now I go 'way like I wan', un I work for Scotty too. I am almost satisfy. But at de las' I weel go 'way. De ole tam, dey weel mak' me. I mus' fin' Pony George before de en'."

"Maybe he's dead," suggested Loudon, moved to cheer up his friend.

"No, she ees not dead. She 'live yet. I can not tell you how I know. I not know how myself, me. But I know. Somew'ere

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she wait teel I come. Un I weel come. I weel come. Den, w'en hees hair ees on my bridle, I weel be complete satisfy, un I weel work on de ranch steady. I not care w'at happen den."

Laguerre fell silent. His reminiscent mood passed on to his comrade. Since leaving the Bend the days had been so crowded that Loudon had had no time to think of anything save the work in hand. But now the tension had slackened, the old days came back to Loudon, and he thought of the girl he had once loved.

He saw her as he used to see her on their rides together along the Lazy River; he saw her swinging in the hammock on the porch of the Bar-S ranch-house; he saw her smiling at him from the doorway of the room in the Burr house; and he saw her dark eyes with the hurt look in them, her shaking shoulders when she turned sidewise in the chair and wept, her blindly swaying figure when she stumbled from the room. All these things he saw on the screen of his mind.

Apparently she loved him. But was the semblance the reality? It was all very well for Mrs. Burr to talk about coquettes. Kate Saltoun had played with him, had led him on to propose, and then at the end had with contumely and scorn refused him. His sense of injury had so developed that his brain had come to dwell more on the contumely and the scorn than it did on the refusal. Mankind is apt to lose sight of the main issue and to magnify minor events till at last the latter completely overshadow the former.

"It ain't possible," reasoned Loudon, "to care for a girl that called ye a ignorant puncher. Some day she might get mad an' call ye that again, an' then where'd ye be? Wouldn't ye look nice with a wife that knowed she was better'n you an' told ye so whenever she felt like it?"

"Well, ain't she better'n you?" queried the honest voice of Inner Consciousness.

"She's lots better," admitted Innate Stubbornness. "But she wants to keep still about it."

"An' she's sure a razzle-dazzler in looks, ain't she?" persisted the still, small voice. "An' her ways have changed a lot. An' she acts like she likes ye. Lately ye been kind o' missin' her some yoreself, ain't ye? Ain't ye, huh? Be kind o' nice to have her round right along, wouldn't it? Sure it would. Which bein' so, don't ye guess Mis' Burr knows what she's talkin' about? Why can't ye have sense an' take the lady's advice?"

"I won't be drove," insisted Innate Stubbornness. "I won't be drove, an' that's whatever."

Inner Consciousness immediately curled up and went to sleep. It had recognized the futility of arguing with Innate Stubbornness. Loudon wondered why he could no longer think connectedly. He gave up trying.

When day broke, the two men left the trail and rode southward. They were tired, but they did not dare halt. In the middle of the afternoon, emerging from a draw, they saw the rails of the Great Western Railroad a hundred yards ahead. They rode westward along the line and reached Damson an hour later.

Two saloons, a blacksmith shop, three houses, the station, and a water-tank, all huddling on the flanks of a railroad corral, made up the town of Damson. It was an unlovely place, and, to complete the effect, a dust-devil received them with open arms.

"Looks like that corral had been used lately," observed Loudon between coughs.

"Bunch o' pony stay dere tree-four day, two week ago, mabbeso," qualified Laguerre.

They dismounted and entered the cracked and peeling station. The agent, a pale, flat-chested young man, responded readily to Loudon's inquiries.

"Surely," he said, "'bout two weeks ago—" riffling duplicate way-bills—"yep, on the seventeenth, Bill Archer shipped ninety-five head Barred Twin Diamond hosses to Cram an' Docket in Piegan City. The two Maxson boys an' a feller they called Rudd was with Archer. Nope, no trouble at all. Eastbound? She's five hours late. Due maybe in an hour an' a half if she don't lose some more. Yep, I'll set the board against her."

WHEN Mr. Cram, senior member of the great horse-dealing firm of Cram & Docket, came down to his office in the morning, Tom Loudon was sitting on the office-steps, an expression of keenest satisfaction on his sunburnt, cinder-grimed face. He had spent the greater part of the preceding two hours strolling among the corrals of Cram & Docket. Mr.

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Cram acknowledged by a curt nod the greeting of Loudon.

"I have all the men I can use," began Mr. Cram gruffly, "and——"

" 'T's all right," interrupted Loudon. "I ain't needin' a job this mornin'. I just thought I'd tell ye that there's ninety-five head o' stolen hosses in number eight corral."

"Wha-what?" gasped Mr. Cram.

"Hurts, don't it? Shouldn't wonder. Yes, sir, them ninety-five Barred Twin Diamonds ye bought offen Bill Archer o' Marysville an' shipped from Damson was all stole from Scotty Mackenzie's Flying M ranch up north near Paradise Bend, in the Dogsoldier valley."

"Why—why—I don't understand," stuttered Mr. Cram. "I don't believe a word of it."

Mr. Cram became suddenly aware of the exceeding chilliness in a pair of gray eyes.

"Meanin' how?" queried Loudon softly.

"Well, of course, I believe you're acting in good faith, but—oh, come inside."

"No need. My train's due in thirty minutes. Scotty Mackenzie an' his foreman Doubleday will come down here an' prove ownership in about a week or so."

"But I've just sold that bunch to a firm in Omaha!"

"Ye won't ship 'em. Ye see, I thought o' yore sellin' 'em, an' I woke up Judge Curran at six o'clock an' got him to issue a injunction against yore shippin' 'em. So I guess ye'll keep 'em till Scotty comes. Yep, I guess ye will, Mr. Cram. See, here comes the marshal now. Looks like that white paper he's got might be the injunction, don't it?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE JUDGE'S OFFICE

LOUDON dropped off the train at Damson into the arms of Johnny Ramsay and Chuck Morgan. Bawling "Pop goes the weasel" they fell upon him, and the three danced upon the platform till a board broke and Chuck Morgan fell down.

Then, in company with the more sedate Laguerre, they jingled across the street to one of the saloons. An hour later they were riding northward, and Loudon was telling Johnny and Chuck what had occurred.

"O' course, just my luck!" complained Johnny. "All done, an' I don't have a look-in. It's all the fault o' that criminal Chuck Morgan. He's out on Cow Creek, an' I have to comb the range for him."

"Ye act like I done it a-purpose!" barked Chuck. "O' course I knowed ye was comin'! That's why I went out there. Think I'm a mind-reader?"

"Ye wouldn't know a mind if ye seen one," retorted Johnny. "How could ye, not ownin' such a thing yoreself? Hey! Don't kick my cayuse! He's a orphan. Go on, Tom, tell us some more 'bout Archer."

The four men did not push their mounts. There was no necessity for haste, and they spent the following afternoon playing cards in a draw five miles out of Marysville. When the sun had set, they rode onward.

Separating at the edge of the town, that their arrival might be unremarked, they met in the rear of Judge Allison's corral. Alone, Loudon approached the house on foot. There was a light in the office. He rapped on the door.

"Come in," called the judge.

Loudon pushed open the door. For an instant he glimpsed the fat figure of the judge and beyond him the surprised faces of Archer and Sheriff Block, and then Archer's hand flung sidewise and knocked over the lamp. Loudon's gun was out, but he did not dare fire for fear of hitting the judge.

Bang! A tongue of flame spat past Loudon's chin. Burning powder-grains singed his neck. A hard object smote him violently in the pit of the stomach and knocked the wind out of him. Loudon fell flat on his back. He was dimly conscious that somebody, in leaping over him, stepped on his face, and that a horse had broken into the judge's office and was kicking the furniture to pieces.

"What's a-matter? What's a-matter?" demanded Johnny Ramsay, stooping above the prostrate Loudon. "Who plugged ye?"

"Ah—ugh—ugh—I—ca—ugh! Can't—ugh—can't b-b-breathe!" gasped Loudon.

Johnny began to tear open his friend's shirt.

"Where's he hit?" queried Chuck Morgan anxiously.

Laguerre squatted down and struck a match. None of the three paid the slightest attention to the terrific uproar in the office of the judge.

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Smash! A table skittered across the room and brought up against the wall.

Thud! Bump! Crash! A chair was resolved into its component parts. The horse lay down on his back and rolled to the accompaniment of falling books, pictures, and finally the bookcase.

Loudon suddenly regained his breath and, to the astonishment of his friends who believed him to be seriously wounded, scrambled to his feet and plunged through the doorway into the office. Apparently the horse had gathered a friend unto himself and both animals were striving to kick their way through the wall.

Loudon felt his way across the wreckage and laid hold of a waving leg. He worked his way up that leg, and was kicked three times in the process, but at last his clawing fingers found a throat—a too fat throat. Loudon, realizing his mistake, groped purposefully for thirty seconds, and then closed his hands round another neck and exerted pressure. The tumult stilled.

"Thank you, friend," huskily breathed the judge's voice. "Choke him some more, but don't quite strangle him."

The judge wriggled to his feet, and Loudon choked his squirming victim almost into unconsciousness. A match crackled and flared. By its flickering light were revealed Loudon kneeling on Archer's chest, Archer himself purple in the face, the judge, naked to the waist and panting like a mogul's air-pump, and in the background the intensely interested faces of Loudon's three friends.

Loudon eased the pressure oi his fingers, and Archer breathed again. Eyes rolling in fright, the judge's negro peered round the door-jamb. His master ordered him to bring a lamp.

"Did the sheriff bring any deputies with him?" inquired Loudon hopefully.

"Not a deputy," replied the judge.

"That's tough. Well, maybe we'll find 'em later. No use chasin' the sheriff anyhow."

When the lamp arrived, Loudon introduced his friends. The judge shook hands cordially, and recalled himself to Chuck Morgan's memory in a way to make that gentleman grin. One could not help but like Judge Allison even if he did fine one on occasion. His pink nakedness covered by a new frock coat, the judge sat down on the overturned bookcase.

Came a knock then at the door, and the voice of the marshal requesting news of the judge's welfare. The marshal entered and gazed about him with incurious eyes.

"I thought mebbe ye was plugged or somethin', Judge," announced the marshal. "Need me?"

"No, Jim," replied the judge. "A gun went off by accident, and I and my friends have been taking a little exercise. Have you seen the sheriff anywhere in the vicinity?"

"I seen him leavin' the vicinity as fast as his hoss could carry him. If he keeps up a-goin' at the ratè he was travelin' an' don't stop nowheres he'd ought to be in Canada inside o' two days. Some o' yore friends is outside, Judge. I'll just go tell 'em it's all right. If ye want me later I'll be right across the street."

The marshal departed to allay popular anxiety. The judge smiled. Archer raised himself on one elbow.

"No use feelin' for yore gun," said Loudon. "I've got it."

"Well, I'd like to know what ye wrastled with me for, Judge," complained Archer. "You an' me's always been friends."

"Friendship ceases when any friend upsets my reading-lamp," countered the judge. "You might have set the house in a blaze. It struck me, you know, that you might possibly leave without explaining your action. Hence my attempt at forcible restraint. I had no other reason, of course. What other reason could I have?"

Archer looked his unbelief. The judge winked at Loudon.

"Judge," said Loudon, "in the corrals o' Cram an' Docket in Piegan City are ninety-five head o' Barred Twin Diamond hosses, all stole from the Flyin' M ranch up near Paradise Bend. Them hosses was shipped from Dawson by Bill Archer here, the two Maxson boys, an' Rudd o' the 88. The five hosses in Archer's corral an' the one he sold you was in the stolen bunch too. My friend, Telescope Laguerre, an' I can swear to a few of 'em, an' any expert could tell ye the brand was altered from the Flyin' M. How about it, Archer?"

"Nothin' to say," replied Archer defiantly.

"This is a serious charge," murmured Judge Allison. "Do you wish me to issue warrants for Archer and the others, Mr. Franklin?"

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"Issue all the —— warrants yo're a mind to!" cried Archer. "I ain't talkin'!"

"Now look here," said Loudon. "Turn yore tongue loose an' it won't go so hard with ye. We know who's behind ye. What's the use o' yore swingin' for them? Have sense, man. There's enough evidence against ye to lynch ye forty times."

"Bring on yore bale o' rope," snarled Archer. "I ain't worryin' none. If ye know who's behind me, what's the use o' askin' me anythin'?"

The contumacious Archer had the rights of the matter, and Loudon realized it.

"We'd ought to lynch him," declared Johnny Ramsay with conviction.

"Not in Marysville, young man," said the judge. "Having, as it were, been the means of preventing Archer's escape, I can not allow him to be hung without due process of law. I shall be delighted to commit him to the calaboose. Archer, you confounded rascal, I shall attach your dance-hall until I recover the price of that horse you sold me! I thought you were a friend of mine, and you make me a receiver of stolen property. The best animal I ever bought too. —— it, sir! I shall try you separately for each horse!"

"He might mebbe escape or somethin'," dubiously suggested Chuck Morgan.

"Chuck, the individuals whom I commit do not escape," the judge said severely. "And in the case of Archer I shall take particular pains to see that he does not break jail. Have no doubts on that score."

He broke off and cursed Archer with wholly unjudicial fervor.

"—— it!" he continued. "If I hadn't known that the rascal wanted the horse in order to conceal evidence, I'd have sold it back to him tonight. The five Barred Twin Diamond horses in his corral are no longer there. They vanished yesterday. But the sorrel won't vanish. He'll stay right in my corral till wanted. Gentlemen, last night some one endeavored to steal him. Luckily, I was watching and with a couple of shots I drove off the would-be thief.

"Tonight Archer and the sheriff came to me and wished to buy the animal. I refused, and they were endeavoring to persuade me when you entered, Mr. Franklin. By the way, if you run across Thomas Loudon, you might tell him that the warrant issued for him has been recalled. Tell him that I hope to meet him in the not too distant future. Understand—in the future? I shall see that the Maxson boys are put under arrest, and a warrant issued for Rudd."

"No need o' issuin' one for him," said Loudon.

"Probably not. Still, the legal formalities must be observed."

"Sure, you've got the right idea, Judge. Well, I guess we might as well be weavin' along. So long, Judge."

"So long, Mr. Franklin, so long, gentlemen. On your way out I wish you'd request the marshal to step in."

"W'at ees next?" inquired Laguerre, when the four were in the saddle.

"Somebody's got to go north an' notify Scotty," replied Loudon. "You an' I'll scamper round the Lazy River country an' see what we can dig up."

"I know just what's comin'!" exclaimed Johnny Ramsay disgustedly. "Chuck an' me are elected to travel while you an' Telescope have all the fun. Yo're glaumin' all the excitement. It ain't right."

"Don't fret none, Johnny-jump-up," grinned Loudon. "Ye'll have all the excitement on the map when ye come back with Scotty Mackenzie an' the Flyin' M outfit. What do ye spose'll happen when we go bulgin' out to the 88 to grab Rudd? Ye don't think there won't be a battle, do ye?"

"There'll be a skirmish anyway before we get back," complained Johnny, "or I don't know you."

"I can't help that, can I? If some 88 sport tries to ventilate me an' Telescope we can't wait for you fellahs. So that's the how of it. You an' Chuck slide up to the Flyin' M, an' when ye come back ye'll find Telescope an' me waitin' for ye at the Cross-in-a-box. See?"

"Oh, I see all right," grunted Chuck Morgan. "I see yo're a hawg, Tom. All ye need is bristles. Tell ye what, send Johnny, an' let me stay with you. Don't need two fellers to carry one little message."

"Not on yore life!" cried the indignant Johnny. "Send Chuck by himself. I don't wanna go. I never did like the climate up on the Dogsoldier nohow. It ain't healthy, an' it'll make me sick or somethin'. An' I ain't a-goin' to risk my valuable health for no man. No, sir, little Johnny Ramsay ain't goin' to."

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"When ye see Scotty," said Loudon, totally unmindful of Johnny's tirade, "tell him to bring four or five o' the boys from the Bend besides the reg'lar outfit. He'll want to leave a couple at the ranch. With us four that'll be fifteen or sixteen men."

"We're elected all right, Chuck," said Johnny mournfully.

"An' don't get rambunkshus an' ride through Farewell," pursued Loudon. "Ride round it—ride 'way round it."

"An' be sure an' wrap up our tootsies good an' warm every night," contributed Chuck Morgan.

"An' take our soothin' sirup before each meal," added Johnny Ramsay. "Lend us yore teethin' ring, Tom. I done forgot mine, an' I'm plumb sure that careless infant, Chuck, has lost his."

CHAPTER XXII

UNDER THE RIDGE

AT DAY'S end, some forty-eight hours after parting with Johnny Ramsay and Chuck Morgan, Loudon and Laguerre rode up to the Bar-S line-camp on Packsaddle Creek. Hockling and Red Kane were unsaddling.

"Hello, rustler!" bawled Red Kane. "Don't ye know no better'n to come fussin' round me when I'm broke? There's two hundred dollars reward for ye."

"Howdy, Red," said Loudon, grinning. "Hello, Hock. Shake hands with my friend, Mr. Laguerre. Telescope, these here bandits are Mr. Hockling and Mr. Kane—Red for short. Boys, did I hear ye say two hundred? Well, that sure makes me plumb ashamed. A thousand ain't none too much for a road-agent like me."

"Yo're right it ain't," laughed Hockling. "But say, Tom, no jokin', yeste'day Red an' me cut the trail o' six deputies—yeah, some o' that Farewell crowd—an' they was a-huntin' for ye. It was them told us 'bout the reward."

"Where'd ye meet 'em?" questioned Loudon.

"Down on the Lazy. They was ridin' east."

"Headin' for the Cross-in-a-box likely."

"Dunno as they'll go that far. From what they said I guess now they think yo're either on this range or holin' out in the Fryin' Pans. Red asked 'em didn't they need some more men—said six gents didn't seem none too plenteous for the job. They got kind o' mad, but they managed to hawg-tie their tempers. I dunno why."

"No, ye don't!" chuckled Red Kane. "Why, gents, Hock had his Winchester 'cross his horn an' was a-coverin' 'em the whole time. Quarrelsome feller, that Hock. Just as soon shoot ye as say howdy."

"I never did like that Farewell gang," Hockling explained shamefacedly. "They always remind me o' kyotes, rattlers, an' such. Anyway, Tom, the outfit's with ye. If them fellers jump ye, Farewell will see some fun. Speakin' o' fun, Farewell ain't knucklin' to Block any too much lately. Mike Flynn an' Buck Simpson had words the other day, an' Buck got fourteen buckshot in his leg. He was lucky he didn't lose his foot. Buck bein' a plumb favoryte o' the sheriff, Block come bulgin' down to arrest Mike, an' Mike he stood off the sheriff with a Winchester, an' cussed him to hellen' back, an' the sheriff didn't arrest him. Now Mike's friends take turns livin' with him, an' keepin' guard while he sleeps. Dunno how it'll end. Be a blowoff mighty soon, I guess."

"You bet," concurred Loudon. "Seen anythin' o' Marvin or Rudd lately?"

"Seen Rudd down near Box Hill two days ago. He was over on our side the creek. Said he was huntin' strays. I knowed he was lyin', an' I watched him from the top o' Box Hill till he went back."

"Yeah," cried Red Kane, busy at the cooking-fire, "Hock come in that night a-cussin' an' a-swearin' 'cause Rudd hadn't given him a chance to finish what Cap'n Burr started. Talked real brutal 'bout Rudd, Hock did. Me, I like the 88 outfit. They're real gentle little woolly lambs, an' some day when I ain't got nothin' else to do I'm goin' over there with a rifle an' make 'em a heap gentler."

"Ye'll have the chance before a great while," Loudon said seriously.

"Is it them cows we lost?" inquired Hockling eagerly.

"I can't tell ye yet awhile," replied Loudon. "Just keep yore mouths shut an' be ready."

"Them's the pleasantest words I've heard in years," stated Red Kane. "Grub pile, folks. Come an' get it."

Loudon and Laguerre spent the night at the line-camp. In the morning they

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recrossed the creek. They rode with Winchesters across their laps, and they took advantage of every bit of cover the broken country afforded. Occasionally they halted, and one or the other went forward on foot and spied out from ridge-crest or knoll-top the line of advance.

By ten o'clock they had worked south to the foot of a ridge opposite Box Hill and about a mile from the creek. For the tenth time that morning Loudon dismounted. He sweated up the slope and plumped himself down behind an outcrop on the crest. He took off his hat and peered past the ragged corner of the rock.

What he saw was sufficiently amazing. Halfway down the reverse slope, where a stunted pine grew beside a boulder, a man lay on his stomach. Loudon could only see his legs. The branches of the pine concealed the upper half of his body. At the bottom of the slope, outlined against a thicket of red sumac, Kate Saltoun, mounted on a black horse, was talking to the puncher Rudd.

The duplicity of woman! Loudon's first thought was that Kate was at her old-time tricks—flirting again. His second was that she was aiding the 88 in their nefarious practises.

What did it mean? Loudon, his eyes hard as gray flint, edged noiselessly backward, and sat up behind the outcrop. He signalled Laguerre by placing two fingers on his lips, pointing over his shoulder, and holding up one finger twice.

Then Loudon flattened his body at the corner of the outcrop, shoved his rifle forward, and covered Rudd. Forefinger on trigger, thumb ready to cock the hammer, he waited.

He could not hear what the two by the sumac bushes were saying. They were fully a hundred and twenty-five yards distant. But it was evident by the way Kate leaned forward and tapped her saddle-horn that she was very much in earnest. Frequently, Rudd shook his head.

Loudon heard a faint rustle at his side. He turned his head. Laguerre was crawling into position.

"Dunno who that sport under the pine is," whispered Loudon. "You take him anyhow, an' I'll take Rudd. Get 'em both without a shot. It's a cinch."

Suddenly, after a decidedly emphatic shake of Rudd's head, Kate's figure straightened, and she struck her saddle-horn a sharp blow with the flat of her hand. It was an action characteristic of Kate. She always employed it when annoyed.

Loudon smiled grimly. With an impatient tug Kate pulled a white object from her saddle-pocket and flung it at Rudd. Then she wheeled her horse on his hind-legs, jumped him ahead, and set off at a tearing run.

Rudd stooped to pick up the fallen white object, and Loudon opened his mouth to bawl a command when he was forestalled by the watcher under the pine.

"Hands up!" came in the unmistakable bellow of Marvin, the 88 range-boss.

Rudd stood up, his hands above his head. The white object lay at his feet. Kate had halted her horse at Marvin's shout. She turned in her saddle and looked back.

"Keep a-goin', lady!" yelled Marvin. "You've done enough. you have! Now you wander, an' be quick about it!"

"Shut up, Marvin!" called Loudon. "You always did talk too much! Keep yore paws up, Rudd! This ain't nothin' like a rescue for ye!"

"You know dat feller under de tree?" demanded Laguerre.

"Not the way you mean, Telescope," replied Loudon, without removing his eyes from Rudd. "He's one o' Blakely's gang—their range-boss."

"Geet up on you han's un knees, you feller," instantly ordered Laguerre, "un move back slow."

Loudon and Laguerre, covering their men, moved down the slope. The 88 puncher took his defeat well. The light-blue eyes above the snub nose met Loudon's stare serenely.

"Yo're sure a whizzer," observed Rudd. "I wouldn't play poker with ye for a small clay farm in Arkinsaw. Yo're too —— lucky."

"It's a habit I've got," said Loudon. "Now if I was you, Rudd, I'd lower my left hand nice an' easy, an' I'd sort o' work my gun-belt down till it slid over my knees, an' I could step out of it."

Rudd complied with this suggestion, and obeyed Loudon's request that he step rearward a few feet and turn his back. Loudon laid down his rifle and drew his six-shooter. With his left hand he scooped the belt to one side and picked up the white object. His eyes told him that it was a lady's

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knotted handkerchief, and his fingers that three twenty-dollar gold pieces were contained therein. Loudon could not have been more astounded if Rudd had suddenly sprouted two horns and a tail.

"Good-by one small drunk an' a new saddle," remarked Rudd, hearing the clinking of the gold.

"You —— sneak!" snarled Marvin, approaching under convoy of Laguerre. "I wondered what ye wanted yore money for this mornin'. I've been watchin' ye for the last two weeks. I seen ye a-comin' back from the Bar-S range three days ago. Tryin' to sell us out, huh?"

"Yo're a liar," retorted Rudd calmly. "I ain't tellin' nothin' I know. Not that I know nothin' nohow."

"By ——, gents!" exclaimed Marvin, "I ask ye as a favor to just gimme ten minutes barehanded with that tinhorn! Ye can do what ye like with me after."

"We will anyway," said Loudon.

"What is this—a sewin' circle?" Rudd inquired contemptuously. "I'd as soon die o' snakebite as be talked to death."

"Well, if I was you, Tom Loudon," sneered Marvin, "I'd try to find out just what Rudd means by meetin' Old Salt's girl. There may be more to it than——"

"Come round in front here, Marvin," commanded Loudon. "Come all the way round. That's it. Telescope, will ye kindly keep an eye on the other party? Now, Marvin, get down on yore knees. Down, ye yellow pup! Yo're a-crowdin' the Gates Ajar so close ye can hear 'em creak. Marvin, say, 'I'm ashamed o' myself, an' I take it back, an' I didn't mean nothin' nohow.' Say it out real loud."

Slowly, his face a mask of venomous hate, Marvin repeated the words.

"Get up, an' face round," continued Loudon. "No, not so close to Rudd. 'Bout five yards to his right, so ye won't be tempted."

For the past two minutes Loudon had been aware of Kate's approach. But he did not turn his head even when she halted her horse almost beside him.

"What do you intend doing with these men, Tom?" she inquired, a perceptible pause between the last two words of the sentence.

"Take 'em to the Cross-in-a-box," replied Loudon, without looking at her. "They'll hang—in time."

"May I have a few words alone with you?"

"Sure, ma'am, sure. I guess two won't be too many to watch, Telescope."

He walked at Kate's stirrup till they were out of earshot. Then he turned and looked up into her face in silence. She gazed at him with a curious, questioning look in her black eyes.

She had become thinner since their last meeting. But her lips were as red as ever. She had lost none of her beauty. Loudon raised his hand. In the open palm was the knotted bit of linen containing the gold pieces.

"Here's yore handkerchief," said he.

Kate made no move to take it. Instead, she continued to look at him, a crooked little smile on her lips. Loudon was the first to lower his gaze. His arm dropped to his side.

"You are trying to be disagreeable," said Kate, "and you succeed in being foolish. The money belongs to that man. He earned it, and it's his."

"It won't do him any good," muttered Loudon.

"That depends on how he spends it."

"He'll never live to spend it."

"You're mistaken. You will let him go."

"That's likely, that is!"

"It's quite likely. In fact, it's a certainty. You will let Rudd go."

"D'ye know he's a hoss-thief? Do ye? I've got proof. He's one o' the bunch stole Scotty's hosses. An' ye want me to let him go?"

"I want you to let him go."

"Well, I won't."

"Listen, Tom, listen to me, please. And take off that horrid, stubborn expression. You look exactly like a sulky child. There, that's much better. Don't smile if it hurts you, grumpy. There, I knew it would come. Oh, it's gone again. Well, anyhow you haven't forgotten how to smile, and that's a blessing."

"I hate to hurry ye, but——"

"I know what a bore it is to be compelled to listen to me, but you'll have to endure the ordeal. Listen, if it hadn't been for me Rudd wouldn't have been here to-day, and you wouldn't have caught him."

"We'd have caught him later."

"Perhaps you wouldn't. At any rate, he'd have probably had a chance to make a fight. As it is, he was caught like a rat in a

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trap. And if it wasn't for me he wouldn't be in the trap."

"Marvin would 'a' got him if we didn't."

"Marvin has nothing to do with it. The fact remains that I am to blame for the capture of Rudd."

"We're much obliged to ye."

"That isn't worthy of you, Tom."

"I beg yore pardon. I was too quick."

"Granted. You were. Since I am to blame, I can do no less than see that he goes free."

"It's no use a-talkin'. He don't go free."

"He will—if I have to keep you here till doomsday. Listen, did you remark the sublime manner in which Marvin jumped at conclusions? You did. Exactly."

"I knowed he was wrong, o' course."

"Oh, you did. How did you know?"

"Well—I—I knowed you."

To Loudon's astonishment Kate burst into shrill laughter.

"For this certificate of good character I thank you," said she, wiping her eyes. "Heavens, if you hadn't made me laugh I'd have gone off into hysterics! What odd minds you men have. Upon my word, I—but no matter. Marvin has no grounds for asserting that Rudd tried to sell out the 88. I ought to know. I did my best to pump him, but I couldn't get a word out of him. He is a clam. I worked so hard too. It made me frightfully angry."

"So that was it! I knowed ye was mad about somethin' when ye banged yore horn thataway an' throwed that handkerchief at him. But—but—say, what was the money for anyhow?"

"That I can not tell you. I am endeavoring at the present moment to point out the difference between Marvin and Rudd. Marvin thought—various things, while Rudd, with good reason for believing that I had betrayed him—it really had a suspicious look about it, you know—uttered no word of reproach."

"Well, just 'cause he acts like a white man, is that any reason for lettin' him go?"

"It is my reason for standing by him."

"Well, ye've stood by him. Ye can't do more. An' it ain't done a bit of good."

"If you knew what he did you'd let him go."

"I do know. That's why I'm freezin' to him."

"If you knew what he did for—for me," patiently persisted Kate, "you'd let him go."

"What did he do for you?"

"I can't tell you. Take my word for it, can't you?"

"How can I? He's a hoss-thief."

"Listen, he was leaving this country. He's quitting the 88 for good. If he had gotten away he'd never have troubled again the Lazy or Dogsoldier ranches. What then will you gain by hanging him?"

"It's the law, Kate—the law of the range. You know that."

"Law! Piecrust! If I told you that Rudd had saved my life at the risk of his own would you let him go?"

"An' he took money for that?" Disgust was rampant in Loudon's tone.

"The taking part is neither here nor there. Remains the fact of his saving my life—at the risk of his own, remember. Now will you let him go? Oh, it's no use asking him," she added quickly, as Loudon half turned. "He'd probably deny it."

"Oh, what's the use, Kate?" exclaimed Loudon impatiently. "If Rudd had stolen my hoss or done somethin' special to me I'd let him go to oblige ye, but it's Scotty has the say. His hosses was stole. An' I'm workin' for Scotty. Can't ye see how it is?"

"I see that you intend to deny my request," Kate said, her black eyes fixed unwaveringly on Loudon's gray ones.

"I've got to."

"Very well. But suppose we have Rudd come here a moment. I'd like you to hear what he has to say. Oh, I'll make him talk."

"But——"

"Good heavens! You're not going to refuse me this little favor, are you? Rudd's a prisoner. He can't get away. Call him over, and afterward if you intend to hold him there's nothing to prevent you."

LOUDON shouted to Laguerre. Rudd, his arms still elevated, walked toward them slowly. Loudon kept him covered. Kate dismounted, leaving the reins on her horse's neck.

"Tom," said she, "give me that money, please. I'd like to give it to him myself."

Loudon handed her the handkerchief. Kate took it and leaned against her horse's shoulder. One arm was flung across the saddle. Rudd halted in front of Loudon. Kate, holding the horse by the bit, stepped forward and stood beside Loudon.

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"Here he is," said Loudon. "What——"

With surprising agility Kate whirled, seized Loudon's gun hand in a desperate grip and jammed her thumb down between the hammer and the firing-pin. Her left arm encircled his waist, and her head twisted sidewise under his chin.

"Run!" she panted. "My horse! The money's in the saddle-pocket!"

Kate hardly needed to speak. Rudd had leaped the instant Loudon's six-shooter was deflected. Before the word "saddle-pocket" had passed Kate's lips Rudd was in the black's saddle, and the animal was thundering away at a furious gallop.

Loudon, straining to break the girl's hold without hurting her, failed lamentably. The two struggling figures swayed to and fro, Kate, her teeth set, hanging on like a bulldog. Loudon's muscles suddenly relaxed.

"All right," he said, "he's out o' range."

Kate loosened her hold on his waist and endeavored to draw back. But her right hand was fast.

"You pulled the trigger, Tom," said she calmly. "My thumb's caught."

Loudon raised the hammer, and the hand fell away. The tender flesh of the thumb was cruelly torn. The blood dripped on the grass. Loudon holstered his six-shooter.

"Gimme yore hand," ordered Loudon roughly.

He lifted her hand, placed her thumb to his lips and sucked the wound clean. Kate watched him in silence. When the edges of the torn flesh were white and puckery Loudon cut away part of Kate's sleeve and made a bandage of the fabric.

"Guess ye'll be all right now," he said. "But ye hadn't ought to 'a' done a fool trick like that. Ye might 'a' got lockjaw."

"Thank you," Kate said, white-lipped "Why—why don't you give me fits for—for helping him to escape?"

"It's done," Loudon replied simply. "Ye had yore reasons, I guess."

"Yes, I had my reasons." Kate's tone was lifeless.

Without another word they walked back to where Laguerre stood beside the sumac bushes. The half-breed's face was impassive, but there was a slight twinkle in his eye as he threw a quick look at Kate.

"You'll be leavin' us now, Miss Saltoun," observed Loudon coldly. "I'll get ye Rudd's pony."

Silently he led forward Rudd's raw-boned cayuse and held him while Kate mounted. She settled her feet in the stirrups and picked up the reins. She met Loudon's gaze bravely, but her eyes were shining with unshed tears. Kate slid her tongue across the edges of her dry lips. She tried to speak, but could not. She bowed her head and touched her horse with the spur.

"Where's yore hoss, Marvin?" inquired Loudon.

"Over behind the ridge in a gully," replied Marvin. "What ye goin' to do with me?"

"Hang ye—in time."

"What for?"

"For bein' too active, Marvin, an' for pickin' the wrong friends. Ye see, Marvin, we've caught Bill Archer an' the Maxson boys, an' the hosses are waitin' for Scotty in Cram an' Docket's corrals in Piegan City. Shorty Simms has cashed. Rudd's wandered, an' now we've caught you. We're sort o' whittlin' ye down like. When Scotty comes we'll get the rest o' ye. Ye see, Marvin, ye hadn't ought to 'a' used Bill Archer. He talks when he's drunk."

To this statement Marvin immediately attributed the most sinister meaning even as Loudon intended he should. Wherein he had failed with Archer, Loudon hoped to succeed with Marvin. The latter, given time to consider impending death might, if promised immunity, talk freely.

"Where we goin' now?" Marvin inquired uneasily.

"To the Cross-in-a-box," replied Loudon, strapping on Rudd's cartridge-belt—Laguerre was wearing Marvin's. "I want Jack Richie to see ye. An' don't get talkative about how Rudd got away. I tell ye flat if ye open yore mouth about that lady ye'll be committin' suicide."

"Dat ees right," declared Laguerre, staring fixedly at the range boss. "Onlee you un Rudd was here. I see nobody else."

"You hear, Marvin," Loudon said grimly. "Now stick yore hands behind yore back. I'm goin' to tie 'em up."

Marvin swore—and obeyed.

"Don't tie 'em so tight," he entreated.

"Yo're too slippery to take chances on," retorted Loudon. "Seen the sheriff lately?"

"Ain't seen him for a month."

"Yo're a cheerful liar. Still it don't matter much. He'll be gathered in with the rest

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o' you murderers when the time comes. They say hangin's an easy death—like drownin'. D'jever think of it, Marvin?"

That luckless wight swore again. Black gloom rode his soul.

"All set," announced Loudon. "C'mon."

THE three plodded up the slope of the ridge. When Loudon's head rose above the crest he saw to his intense disgust that six horsemen were picturesquely grouped about Brown Jug and the gray. The six were staring in various directions. Two were gazing directly at the three on the ridge. Loudon and Laguerre, forgetting their charge for the moment, flung themselves down.

Promptly the six men tumbled out of their saddles and began to work their Winchesters. Loudon, aiming with care, sent an accurate bullet through a man's leg. Laguerre dropped a horse.

Then Loudon, mindful of the prisoner, looked over his shoulder. Marvin, running like a scared goat, was half-way to the shelter of the sumacs.

"Blow —— out of 'em, Telescope!" cried Loudon. "I got to get Marvin!"

He rolled a few yards down the slope and knelt on one knee. He dropped two bullets in quick succession in front of Marvin's flying feet.

"C'mon back!" he shouted. "The next one goes plumb center!"

Marvin halted. He returned slowly. Loudon, watching him, became aware that Laguerre's rifle was silent. He glanced quickly around. Laguerre, with his skinning-knife, was picking frantically at a jammed cartridge. At his feet lay Marvin's rifle, the lever half down, and the bullet end of a cartridge protruding from the breech. Both rifles had jammed at the crucial moment.

"Take mine," said Loudon, and tossed his rifle to Laguerre. "'T's all right, Marvin," he continued in a shout. "Keep a-comin'. I can reach ye with a Colt! What ye cussin' about, Telescope? Mine jam too?"

"Dem feller pull out," growled Laguerre. "While I was try for feex my Winchestair dey spleet un go two way. Dey behin' de nex' heel now. Dey tak' our pony too, —— 'em."

"Set us afoot, huh? That's nice. Couldn't have a better place to surround us in neither. No cover this side. Let's cross the draw. There's somethin' that looks like rocks over there."

Driving Marvin ahead of them they crossed the draw at a brisk trot and climbed the opposite side. Loudon had not been mistaken. There were rocks on the ground beyond. From the edge of the draw the land fell away in a three-mile sweep to the foot of a low hill. Loudon grinned.

"They can't Injun up on us from this side," he said. "We'll stand 'em off all right."

Swiftly they filled in with rocks the space between two fair-sized boulders. Then they tied the wretched Marvin's ankles and rolled him over on his face behind their tiny breastwork.

"I don't think any lead'll come through," said Loudon cheerfully. "It looks pretty solid. But it would sure be a joke if one o' yore friend's bullets should sift through ye, Marvin, now wouldn't it?"

Leaving Marvin to discover, if Providence so willed, the point of the joke, Loudon picked up his rifle and lay down behind the smallest boulder. Laguerre, lying on his side, was working at his jammed breech-action. He worried the shell out at last, and took his place.

Loudon saw Laguerre put a small pebble in his mouth, and he frowned. Not till then had he realized that he was thirsty. He followed Laguerre's example. Packsaddle Creek was close by, and it might as well have been distant a hundred miles. The thought made Loudon twice as thirsty, in spite of the pebble rolling under his tongue. Far down the draw, on Loudon's side of the breastwork, two riders appeared.

"Two of 'em in sight, Telescope," said Loudon. "See any?"

"Me, no. What dey do, dem two?"

"They're crossin' the draw. Now they're climbin' up. They think we're still where we was. Hope they come right along."

The two riders galloped toward the boulders. Loudon and Laguerre, flattening their bodies, squeezed close to the rock. When the galloping pair were three-quarters of a mile distant they halted.

"They don't just like the looks o' these rocks," observed Loudon. "Well, they give us credit o' havin' sense anyway."

The two horsemen began to circle. Loudon settled himself and squinted along his sights. His finger dragged on the trigger. It was a long shot, and he missed. The two

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men immediately separated. One rode back over the way they had come. The other galloped out a mile and a half, then turned and rode parallel to the draw. Opposite the rear of the breastwork he halted.

"They sure do think o' everythin'," remarked Loudon. "But if they guess we can't get away tonight they can guess again. I dunno what we'll do with Marvin. Yo're puttin' us to a heap o' trouble, you are, Mister Range-Boss. Say, while I think of it, have ye branded any more Crossed Dumbbell cows?"

Marvin was silent. The mocking voice continued:

"That was sure well thought of, Marvin, but ye was whirlin' too wide a loop. Instead o' tryin' to make me out a rustler ye'd ought to 'a' shot me in the back like ye did the Sheriff o' Sunset."

"I didn't kill him," grunted the stung Marvin.

"I know ye didn't. When I said you I meant yore outfit. Shorty Simms pulled the trigger."

"Nothin' to do with me."

"Maybe not. We'll see."

"Ye can't prove nothin'."

"Keep on a-thinkin' so if it helps ye any. Ye'd ought to know, Marvin, that in any gang o' thieves there's always one squealer, sometimes two. In this case, one's enough, but we don't object to another."

"Oh, ——!" grunted Marvin. "Ye give me a pain."

"I expect. Ye see, Marvin, a while back ye accused Rudd o' sellin' ye out. Them words have a right innocent sound, ain't they now? Sure they have. Why, ye blind fool, do ye s'pose we'd be a-freezin' to ye this way if we didn't have ye dead to rights?"

Marvin lay very still. He almost appeared not to breathe.

"Ye ain't got out o' this hole yet," he muttered.

"We will, don't ye worry none about that. An' we'll take ye with us—wherever we go. Think it all over, Marvin. I may have somethin' to say to ye later."

Crack! A rifle spoke on the opposite ridge, and a bullet glanced off Loudon's boulder with a discordant whistle. *Crack! Crack! Crack!* Long 45-90 bullets struck the breastwork with sharp splintering sounds, or ripped overhead, humming shrilly.

"Let's work the old game on 'em," suggested Loudon. "There's room for two my side."

Laguerre crawled over and lay down beside Loudon. The latter had aligned several large rocks beside his boulder. Between these rocks the two thrust the barrels of their rifles. One would fire. On the heels of the shot an opposing rifle would spit back. Then the other would fire into the gray of the smoke-cloud.

It is an old trick, well known to the Indian fighters. Loudon and Laguerre employed it for half an hour. Then the enemy bethought themselves of it, and Laguerre returned to the other end of the breastwork with a hole in his hat and his vest neatly ripped down the back.

The five deputies kept up a dropping fire. But the two behind the breastwork replied infrequently. Ammunition must be conserved. They anticipated brisk work after nightfall. They waited, vigorously chewing pebbles, and becoming thirstier by the minute. The boulders radiated heat like ovens.

The afternoon lengthened. It was nearing five o'clock when Loudon suddenly raised his head.

"Where was that rifle?" he inquired sharply.

"Ovair yondair—not on de ridge," replied Laguerre.

"That's what I thought. Maybe—there she goes again. Two of 'em."

The rifles on the ridge snarled angrily. But no bullets struck the breastwork. The barking of the deputies' rifles became irregular, drifted southward, then ceased altogether. A few minutes later five horsemen and a led horse crossed the draw a mile to the south.

"Two of 'em hit bad," declared Loudon.

"Ye bet ye," said Laguerre. "See dat! One of 'em tumble off."

"They're gettin' him aboard again. Tak'-in' our hosses along, the skunks! There goes our friend out yonder."

The man who had been watching the rear of the breastwork galloped to meet his friends. Five minutes later they all disappeared behind one of the western hills.

"Hey, you fellers!" bawled a voice from the shelter of the ridge across the valley. "Where are ye, anyway?"

"That's Red Kane," laughed Loudon, and stood up. "Here we are!" he yelled.

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"C'mon over! We're all right! Not a scratch!"

Red Kane and Hockling, leading three horses, appeared on the crest of the ridge.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SMOKE OF CONFLICT

"FOUND him hid right pretty in a gully," said Hockling, indicating the extra horse.

"Yore hoss, Marvin?" queried Loudon.

Marvin nodded surlily. He had had his share of the water in the rescuers' canteens, but he was no happier.

"It's sure providential, yore happenin' down this way," said Loudon. "We'll do as much for you some day."

"Yo're welcome, but it ain't none providential, Tom," denied Hockling. "Me an' Red was fixin' the corral fence at the camp when up come Kate Saltoun on the jump an' says how ye was standin' off six men opposite Box Hill. 'It's them deputies!' shouts Red, an' ropes a hoss immediate. Well, we come along, the three of us, an' that's all. It was long range, but I think I drilled one deputy. Red creased one, too."

"Ye bet I did!" cried Red Kane. "I seen his arm flop when I fired."

"What's that about the three o' ye comin' along?" said Loudon.

"Why, Kate, she was with us. She changed her saddle to one o' our fresh hosses. She wouldn't quit nohow till she heard ye say ye was all right. Then she started off home. Funny, she was ridin' a 88 pony when she struck the line-camp."

"That's sure odd, but it don't matter none. I'll—I'll see Kate later."

"Sure," said Hockling, wondering at the lack of warmth in Loudon's tone. But Western etiquette forbids the questioning of another's motives.

"Say," remarked Red, hastening to break the awkward silence, "say, won't Block feel happy when he finds we've done ventilated his deputies?"

"Yeah," replied Loudon, "an' the funny part of it is, they ain't got no right to arrest me. That warrant has been pulled in."

"Ye sure forgot to mention that last night," Hockling said disgustedly. "Here Red an' me have been pattin' ourselves on the back for runnin' a blazer on the law. An' now, come to find out, them deputies was in the wrong, an' so we only give 'em what was comin' to 'em anyway."

"Well, you've got a nerve, you have!" exclaimed the indignant Loudon. "Do ye think I'm goin' round dodgin' warrants so you two jiggers can run blazers on the sheriff?"

He made a swift movement.

"Leggo my legs!" yelled Hockling. "I got on my new pants, an' I don't want the seat tore out! Hey, ye idjit! Leggo!"

When order was restored and Hockling was tenderly feeling his precious trousers, Loudon suggested that Red, the lightest man, take Marvin's fresh pony and ride to the line-camp for food and two horses.

"Ye'll sure have yore work cut out," said Red as he mounted, "to ride them ponies bareback. We ain't even got an extra bridle."

"Don't worry none," Loudon said. "We'll make bridles an' Injun surcingles out o' Marvin's rope, an' we'll toss for his saddle."

"HOW you feel, Tom?" inquired Laguerre, stretched at ease on a cot in the Cross-in-a-box ranch-house.

"Whittled to the chin," replied Loudon. "Which that pony's ridge-pole could give odds to a knife-blade on bein' sharp. We might 'a' knowed Marvin would win the toss. His own saddle, too."

"Eet ees de las' piece o' luck she weel have for varree long tam."

"I ain't so sure about that. There's no real evidence to show that Marvin's a rustler. 'Ceptin' Rudd, ye can't connect any of the 88 outfit with the hoss-stealin'. I know they done it. I always knowed Sam Blakely was at the bottom of it, an' I can't prove it yet. Here's you an' I rode from hell to breakfast an' back, an' all we've got to show for it is Archer an' the Maxson boys —an' the hosses, o' course. Unless I find out somethin' more soon an' sudden, I've got to take off Marvin's hobbles. My bluff about Bill Archer's blabbin' ain't workin' with Marvin. He's worried, an' he shows it, but he's standin' pat. I spent a solid hour with him tonight, an' all he does is cuss an' beef about what'll happen when Blakely finds out his range-boss has been kidnapped. It makes me sick!"

Laguerre nodded sympathetically.

"Ye can't tell me," continued Loudon, "that them Marysville sports was the only ones in the hoss-stealin' deal. If they was,

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then why was Pete O'Leary expectin' Sam Blakely the day I struck the Bend, an' why was Rufe Cutting planted in the cook's job at the Flyin' M? It all points—so far. An' the rustlin' o' the Bar-S an' Cross-in-a-box cattle—there's another mystery. Oh, it's a great life, this here detective business!"

"Tell you w'at, Tom," Laguerre suggested hopefully, "you un me, huh, we weel bushwhack dees Blak'lee feller. W'at you say?"

"Can't be did, Telescope. We've got to get him the right way, so the folks o' Sunset an' Fort Creek'll know just why he went. That goes for his outfit an' Block an' his deputies, too. They're all in it up to their belts. They've made Fort Creek County what it is—a place where a straight gent has to watch himself an' what's around him all the time. Shorty Simms killed the Sheriff o' Sunset, but Blakely an' the 88 made the killin' possible. Oh, what's the use? I'm goin' to sleep."

But Loudon did not go to sleep at once. He had too much on his mind. From Blakely and the 88 his perplexed thoughts shifted to Kate Saltoun and the sinful ease with which she had made a fool of him; he had trusted her, and she had betrayed him. The daughter of a ranchman, she had flouted the law of the range. Given the thief money too. It was almost incredible.

Idiot that he was, to believe for an instant that she loved him! Knowing her of old, it served him right, he told himself. He thanked Heaven that he did not love her, had not loved her since that day in the Bar-S kitchen.

Quite naturally then, since he was so absolutely sure of himself and his emotions, he wondered how Rudd had had the luck to save Kate's life. He wished that it had been himself, in order that he might have made some small return for services rendered.

She had done a great deal for him at the Bend. She had simplified a most complex situation by bringing to his assistance Hockling and Red Kane. He undoubtedly owed a lot to Kate. Nevertheless, he assured himself that her conduct in the matter of Rudd's escape had squared the account. Of course it had. And he was glad of it. For, under the circumstances, he would never have to see her again. The Spinning Sister heard, and smiled—and Loudon fell asleep.

"Hey, Tom! Wake up!"

It was Jack Richie's voice that shouted, and it was Jack Richie's hand that shook Loudon awake.

"What's a-matter?" Loudon opened sleepy eyes.

"Yore hoss is outside. Yore hoss, Ranger, an'——"

Jack Richie was almost overset by the blanket-shedding cyclone that whirled out of bed and through the doorway. In front of the ranch-house stood Ranger, surrounded by Richie's amazed and conjecturing cowboys. The horse raised his wise head, cocked his ears and nickered softly at Loudon's approach.

"It's him," grinned Loudon. "It's the little hoss. Well, fellah, you old tiger-eye."

He rubbed the white spot on Ranger's nose. The horse nipped his fingers with soft lips.

"Found him tied to the post out back o' the wagon-shed," volunteered the cook. "I sure thought I was seein' things."

"Funny he didn't whinner," said Loudon.

"There was a flour-sack over his head," explained the cook. "Here it is."

"That don't tell me nothin'," Loudon said. "Everybody uses Triple X. An' that hackamore could be just anybody's too. Whoever brought him sure walked in the water."

"It ain't likely possible now," observed Jack Richie, "that Rufe Cutting could 'a' got religion or somethin'."

"It's possible, but it ain't likely," said Loudon. "Well, fellah, c'mon an' get ye a drink, an' then for the big feed. Ye're gone off a good forty pounds since ye quit me."

Later, Loudon, in company with Laguerre, visited the post where Ranger had been tied. Laguerre closely scrutinized the gound in the vicinity.

"Hoss she been tied up six-seven hour," observed Laguerre.

"It's 'bout half-past five now. That makes it ten or eleven when he was brought in."

"'Bout dat. Feller lead heem een. Hard to read de sign on de grass, but eet look lak de feller not walk good een hees boot—dey too beeg, mabbeso. Come 'long. We weel see w'ere feller she leave hees hoss."

They followed the trail a hundred yards, and then Laguerre knelt down, his eyes searching the grass. He picked up a small

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stone and held it up. The stone was sharp-cornered. It was stained a dark red.

"Feller she treep un fall on hees han's un knees," explained Laguerre. "Lef' han' heet de leetle rock, un geet cut some. Han' bleed on eet."

Laguerre rose, tossed away the stone, and proceeded to follow the trail. He led the way to a tall pine some three hundred yards distant from the ranch-house. Even Loudon's unpractised eyes told him that a horse had stood beneath the pine.

"Here feller she climb een de saddle un go 'way," said Laguerre. "No use follow de trail any more."

They returned to the ranch-house, Loudon wondering greatly as to the identity of the mysterious philanthropist. In Cow-Land a stolen horse is not returned except under compulsion. While they were at dinner the cook stuck his head through the doorway.

"Bunch o' riders a-comin' from the north," he announced, "an' they're a-comin' some swift."

"Scotty!" exclaimed Loudon, and ran to the window.

"It may be the sheriff," said Jack Richie, hastening to provide himself with a Winchester.

"It's Scotty," Loudon said. "I can tell him a mile off. He's wearin' the same shirt, red sleeve an' all."

The horsemen, some thirty men, rode up at an easy lope. Besides Scotty, Loudon recognized Doubleday, Johnny Ramsay, Chuck Morgan, Swing Tunstall, Giant Morton, Ragsdale, and many others.

"He's brought the whole ranch an' half the Bend," chuckled Loudon, and then swore gently, because he suddenly remembered that there was no evidence against Blakely.

With thirty men the 88 could be shown the error of its ways most effectually. And now the thirty could not be used. What a waste of good material!

The band of horsemen, bawling greetings to the group in the doorway, jingled to a halt. Loudon stepped forward and shook Scotty's proffered hand.

"Ye've sure done fine," said Scotty. "Ye've filled out just what I said 'bout opportunity with a big O. I ain't forgettin' it neither. Besides Rudd now, did ye run across anythin' touchin' Sam Blakely?"

"Not a thing," Loudon replied, "an' it's no use a-goin' out to the 88 lookin' for Rudd. He's sloped. My fault he got away, too."

"That's sure tough, but it don't matter a heap. Ye found the hosses an' three o' the thieves anyway."

"Yeah, but they ain't enough. We'd ought to get 'em all, an' as far's I can see there ain't no chance o' gettin' 'em all."

"Don't ye care. What ye've done suits me. I'm satisfied."

"I ain't," said Loudon, "but I s'pose I've got to be. It makes me sick! Lot o' work gone for nothin'. We grabbed the 88 range-boss on the off-chance he'd chatter, but he won't say a word. He's tied up in Jack Richie's storeroom right now."

"Blakely's range-boss, huh? Well, ye can't hang him without proof, Tom."

"I know that. Got to turn him loose, o' course. Did ye see anythin' o' Block or Blakely or that gang when ye come through Farewell?"

"We didn't strike Farewell. We rode here the shortest way. Why—what's the matter?"

For Loudon had ripped out an amazed oath.

"Y're rope!" exclaimed Loudon. "Where did ye get that rope?"

"Oh, Doubleday found it down by the little corral the mornin' after him an' the boys rode in from the Bend—after them hosses was stole."

"Why didn't ye tell me about it then? That rope was all I needed. Say, Johnny, d'jever see this rope before?"

Loudon held up the end of the rope. The holdfast was missing, and the end had been lapped with many turns of whip-cord. Johnny squinted at the rope's end. Jack Richie and the others crowded in.

"Yeah," said Johnny Ramsay, "now I think of it, you an' me was in Mike Flynn's in Farewell when Sam Blakely bought him that rope with the whip-cord on the end. That was the day you bought a green neck-tie. Sure, I remember. Blakely he asked Mike what that whip-cord was, an' Mike called it whippin'."

"That's what he did," declared Loudon. "I noticed this whippin' jigger special, an' I can swear to it on a stack o' Bibles a mile high. It's the same rope all right enough."

Scotty observed that he would be consigned to everlasting damnation. Ropes, he had supposed, were all alike.

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"I knowed that rope must 'a' belonged to one o' the rustlers," said Scotty, "but it was such a little thing that I'd forgot all about it by the time you got back to the ranch, Tom. Blakely's rope! It's sure amazin'."

"It sort o' settles the cat-hop, don't it?" said Loudon.

"Kind o'," Scotty said, his frosty blue eyes gleaming. "We'll wander over to the 88 right away. I guess now we'll leave Marvin tied up yet awhile. We'll attend to him later. Can ye give us fresh hosses, Jack?"

"Can I?" exclaimed Jack Richie. "Watch me. I guess me an' a few o' the boys will ride along with ye. Just to see fair play like."

"Say, Scotty," Loudon said, while the fresh horses were being roped, "I sure hope Pete O'Leary didn't see you an' the bunch leavin' the Bend."

"He didn't," replied Scotty. "O'Leary ain't with us no more—No, not that way. He's alive yet so far as I know. But he pulled his freight some sudden 'bout two weeks ago. Dunno why."

"Maybe we'll see his smilin' face again pretty soon," Loudon observed significantly.

"Then here's hopin' it'll be in bad company," said Scotty Mackenzie.

AN HOUR later the band, now numbering forty-two men, started for the 88 ranch. They rode northwest, intending to pass through Farewell, for it was quite possible that Brown Jug and the gray had been taken into town.

As they neared the town a rattle of shots came down the wind. With one accord the forty-two drove the spurs into their mounts.

At the top of the slight rise above the little town they halted. The windows of Bill Lainey's hotel and Piney Jackson's blacksmith shop were banked in drifting smoke, through which red tongues of flame flashed at intervals. From the cover of boulders, wagon-bodies, the hotel corral, and the Happy Heart Saloon, rifle-working citizens were pouring lead into the two places. Farther up the street several Winchesters in the Blue Pigeon Store were replying to the fire from the opposite houses and from a barn in the rear of the store.

"Sheriff Block an' his outfit are lockin' horns with some friends o' mine, I guess," observed Loudon.

"That ain't no way for a sheriff to act," said Scotty. "Let's go down an' tell him so. Friends o' Tom's, boys."

Loudon was already galloping down the slope. In his wake scattered hoof-beats became a thuttering drum. Men whooping and yelling, wild-eyed horses straining every muscle, the charge swept down upon the besiegers of Lainey's Hotel and Jackson's blacksmith shop.

The sheriff's friends broke like a covey of quail. The rifles in the hotel and blacksmith shop chattered like mad. Loudon headed toward the hotel corral where two men were in hiding. But there was no one there when he reached it.

He rode past the corral and galloped along the rear of the buildings fronting on the street. Twice he was shot at, one bullet nicking his horse's hip. But he contrived to reach the other end of the town unwounded, raced across the street, and dismounted behind the sheriff's corral. His feet had barely touched the ground when Johnny Ramsay, Laguerre, and Chuck Morgan joined him.

"Ye idjit!" cried Johnny. "Don't ye know no better'n that? Don't ye suppose they can hit ye at twenty yards? Ye wasn't that far away from the backs of them houses. Ain't ye got no sense at all?"

"Well, they didn't hit me, an' I notice three other idjits didn't have no better sense. Duck!"

Loudon jerked Johnny down just as a bullet gashed the side of a post above his head. Johnny ceased talking and ran hurriedly to where Chuck Morgan was kneeling behind a corner of the corral. Loudon joined Laguerre at the other corner.

The four were in an excellent position. The corral commanded the rear and one side of the sheriff's shack, the rear of the Happy Heart Saloon, and one side of the barn in the rear of the Blue Pigeon Store.

A man ran out of the barn. Laguerre's rifle cracked. The man stumbled, dropped, dragged himself to his hands and knees, and then huddled down slackly. Laguerre pumped in another cartridge. The staccato din at the other end of town was increasing. The heavy roars of several buffalo guns punctuated the steady crackling of the Winchesters' whip-like reports. Loudon smiled a slow smile and cuddled his

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rifle-butt against his shoulder. The world was coming his way at last.

"That sheriff sure wouldn't 'a' built his corral so solid," observed Loudon, "if he'd looked ahead."

"You bet he wouldn'," said Laguerre. "Dees log ees fine. No bullet come troo dem. Bimeby we geet Meestair Block, mebbeso."

"He may be down in the Happy Heart. There ain't been a shot from the shack yet. He's in town all right though. His hoss and seven others are in the corral—" Loudon peered through a crack in the logs—"can't see the brands. They're turned the wrong way."

"Dere ees a lot o' pony een dat corral down dere," said Laguerre.

"That's behind the Happy Heart Saloon. Lord help 'em if they try to slide out on 'em."

Zing-g-g! A bullet ricochetted from a near-by boulder and hummed above Loudon's hat.

"That came from the barn," said Loudon, firing at a gray smoke-cloud high up on the side of the structure. "They've knocked a hole in a board, I guess. Yep—" as the thinning smoke revealed a black opening—"they have."

Shooting carefully and without haste, Loudon and Laguerre rendered firing from that hole in the barn a case of suicide. From their corner Johnny Ramsay and Chuck Morgan alternately drove questing bullets into the barn and the rear of the Happy Heart Saloon.

The firing from the barn slackened. That from the Happy Heart redoubled in vigor. The glass window-sashes began to fall in tinkling rain on the ground.

"The boys must 'a' gotten into the houses across the street," said Loudon. "They're a-firin' right through the saloon."

"She weel be dark een two hour," Laguerre remarked irrelevantly.

"I know it. We'll have to finish up before then or they'll get away. Plug any, Johnny?"

"One," was the laconic reply of that expert with a rifle.

"He didn't neither!" denied Chuck Morgan. "I got him. Johnny was loadin' his rifle at the time the feller cashed. Johnny couldn't hit a flock o' barn doors flyin' low—not with *his* rifle."

"Oh, couldn't I, huh?" yapped Johnny Ramsay. "Well, if I hadn't 'a' got him you'd be a-lyin' there right quiet an' peaceful with yore hat over yore face. I hit what I aim at. I ain't been shootin' holes in boards like some people."

At this juncture the door of the Happy Heart opened a crack, and Johnny and Chuck forgot their argument at once. The door closed abruptly, the wood near the knob gashed and scarred by several bullets.

"This is gettin' monotonous," said Loudon. "I thought there'd be action this side an' there ain't a bit. The barn has gone to sleep. I'm goin' into the sheriff's shack. I'll bet it's empty."

"Dey geet you from the barn, mabbeso," Laguerre suggested.

"No, they won't—not if ye keep 'em away from that hole."

Loudon laid his rifle down, pulled his hat firmly over his ears and raced toward the shack, jerking out his revolvers as he ran. He reached the door of the shack without a shot having been fired at him.

Fully aware that death might be awaiting his entry, he drove his shoulder against the door and burst it open. He sprang across the doorsill and halted, balancing on the balls of his feet.

Save for the loud ticking of an alarm-clock there was no sound in the shack. The door of the front room stood open. Through the doorway Loudon glimpsed a broken chair, and beside it, where the floor sagged, a pool of blood. Loudon walked into the front room.

His eyes beheld a scene of the wildest disorder. There had been a fierce fight in that front room. On his back on the floor, his legs under the table, lay Sheriff Block, his black beard reddened with blood from a wound in the cheek. One hand gripped the butt of a six-shooter and the other clutched the breast of his flannel shirt. There were two bullet-holes in the sheriff's chest.

Across the base of the closed front door lay the body of Rufe Cutting. He had been literally cut to pieces. Only his face was unmarked. Otherwise he was a ghastly object. From beneath his body oozy runlets of blood had centered in the pool beside the chair.

Propped up against the side wall, his legs outstretched, sat a stranger. Blood spotted and stained the floor about him. He had been shot in the legs and the chest. Across his knees lay a Winchester. Beside him a

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long knife, red from hilt to point, was stuck upright in the floor. The stranger's chin was on his breast, a bloody froth flecked his lips. So positive was Loudon that the stranger was dead, that, when the man jerked his head upright, he jumped a full yard backward. Weakly the wounded man plucked at his Winchester, his dull eyes fixed on Loudon. The latter ran to his side.

"It's all right, stranger," cried Loudon, "I'm a friend."

At this assurance the stranger ceased in his effort to raise his rifle.

"Water," he muttered faintly, "water."

In a corner stood a bucket and a tin dipper. Loudon scooped up a dipperful and held it to the man's lips. He drank chokingly, and half the water spilled out on his shirt.

"Stranger," muttered the wounded man, "I'm goin' away from here in a hurry. Pull off my boots, will ye?"

Loudon complied with the request. The removal of the boots must have cruelly hurt the wounded legs, but the man did not even groan.

"That's better," muttered the man, when the boots were off. "I was sure hopin' I wouldn't have to cash with 'em on. Who's yore friend?"

Loudon whirled, for his nerves were on edge, and Laguerre, who had entered without a sound, only saved himself from death by a cat-like leap to one side. As it was, Loudon's bullet missed him by the veriest fraction of an inch. Loudon shamefacedly holstered his weapon.

"My fault," said Laguerre calmly. "Nex' time eet ees bes' I speak firs', yes. Who ees de man?"

"I dunno. Who are ye, stranger?"

"Did ye kill him?" queried the stranger, his eyes beginning to film over.

"No, he's a friend too. Can't ye tell yore name?"

"I'm Tom Hallaway," was the thickly uttered response. "Rufe Cutting killed my brother Jim an' stole his pinto hoss. Block was with Cutting, an' helped him. I got 'em both. I said I'd cut Rufe's heart out —an' I sure—done it. Gimme a—drink."

But before the water came, Tom Hallaway's head fell forward, and he died.

"Look here," said Laguerre, who had looked out of the window opposite Tom Hallaway.

Loudon went to the window. Beneath it two dead men were sprawled. Their stiffened fingers clutched six-shooters.

"They drilled him through the window," said Loudon, "an' he got 'em both."

Laguerre nodded solemnly.

"Brave man, dat Tom Hallaway," said Telescope Laguerre.

CHAPTER XXIV

BEFORE THE DAWN

THE window through which Tom Hallaway had been shot faced the open country. The other two windows in the room flanked the front door. The thoughtful Laguerre had brought Loudon's rifle in with him, and the two men squatted down behind the windows. Their view of Main Street was excellent. They could see almost the whole width of the street from one end of the town to the other.

Far down the street the windows of Lainey's Hotel were smoking like the gunports of an old-time line-o'-battle-ship. The men in the hotel seemed to be devoting all their attention to the Happy Heart and the houses between it and Piney Jackson's blacksmith shop.

Directly opposite the Happy Heart was a small store from which three or four men were directing a heavy fire at the saloon. Next to the store were four empty corrals, and then came some twenty houses, the twentieth opposite the sheriff's shack. Of these houses all save the three nearest the corrals were silent. The folk in these three were carrying on a duel with the defenders of the Blue Pigeon Store, whose fire had slackened somewhat.

"I sure hope they haven't got Mike," said Loudon, and drove a bullet close above a window-sill of the middle house of the three. "He's a good fellah." Another bullet nicked the window-sill. "This can't go on forever." Again a bullet shaved the window-sill. "Somethin's goin' to pop some soon."

Something did pop. The firing from the Happy Heart culminated in a terrific volley, and then ceased abruptly.

"That's funny," commented Loudon. "It can't—they're slidin' out!"

Which latter remark was called forth by a sudden outburst of firing from the corral where Johnny and Chuck were stationed. Loudon and Laguerre ran out the back way. The former's surmise was correct.

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The Happy Heart defenders had broken cover and reached the big corral behind the saloon. Four of them were down in front of the corral gate. They would never pull trigger again. But the others, in number a score or more, had reached their horses and were pouring out of the gate in the far side of the corral.

Loudon perceived that the two riders in the lead were mounted on Brown Jug and the gray. These two kept together. The remaining fugitives wisely fled separately and in many directions.

Loudon and Laguerre did not fire. The range was a long five hundred yards; too long for accurate shooting when the target is astride a racing horse. Imbued with the same idea they ran to their horses, flipped the reins over their heads and jammed their Winchesters into the scabbards. Both ponies were galloping at full speed when the two were settled in their saddles.

"We can not catch dem!" cried Laguerre ten minutes later.

"We'll try, anyhow," replied Loudon, standing up in the stirrups to ease his horse, and wishing that he had ridden Ranger.

Half an hour later it became obvious that pursuit was useless. Brown Jug and the gray had the legs of the pursuers' horses. The sun was setting, too. Loudon and Laguerre pulled in their panting mounts.

"Here comes Johnny an' Chuck," said Loudon.

"Could ye tell who they was?" demanded Johnny breathlessly.

"They kept their backs to us," Loudon replied drily, "an' they didn't leave any cards."

"Ain't got no manners at all," said Johnny Ramsay. "They're headin' northwest, an' they sure ought to get there. C'mon back, I'm dry."

"They was seven 88 ponies in Block's corral," said Chuck Morgan. "Let's hurry. Maybe we can get the owners yet."

"If they ain't already been got," said Johnny Ramsay.

"Seven 88 ponies," repeated Loudon. "I seen 'em in the corral, but I couldn't see the brand. Seven. That means seven o' the outfit was in Farewell, an' more'n seven, maybe. I don't believe Blakely was there. He's been mighty cautious lately. Well, anyhow, countin' seven at Farewell, there'd ought to be eight more at the four line-camps. Rudd's quit, an' Marvin is hog-tied, an' Shorty Simms is dead. Accordin' to my figurin', that makes eighteen."

"Yo're well educated, Mr. Loudon," said Johnny Ramsay.

"Correct. Well then, unless Blakely has hired a bunch o' new men, which ain't likely, then eighteen from twenty-five leaves seven."

"First class in 'rithmetic will take the front seats," remarked Chuck solemnly. "The little boys mustn't sit with the little girls. Attention, children, an' I'll interduce our new teacher, Mr. Thomas Loudon, a well-known— Hi, you leave my cayuse alone, Tom! I'm the only gent he allows to spur him. —— it all, he's goin' to buck, an' I'm all het up anyhow. Oh, ——! I knowed it!"

"Chuck ought to ride pitchers for a livin'," commented Loudon. "Ain't he graceful? Go ye ten, Telescope, he pulls leather."

Chuck returned to them ten minutes later. He sidled his now thoroughly chastened pony in between Ramsay and Laguerre.

"I'll have nothin' more to do with that long-legged feller on the left o' the line," Chuck announced to the world at large. "He'd just as soon break a friend's neck as not. He ain't got no feelin's whatever. 'Rithmetic's done locoed him."

"As I was sayin' before I was interrupted," said Loudon, grinning, "eighteen from twenty-five leaves seven. There oughtn't to be more'n seven men at the 88 ranchhouse an' they won't be expectin' callers. There's four of us. What's the answer?"

"Dat ees fine," Laguerre said. "We weel geet dere before Scotty un de odders come. I say we go."

"Me too," said Johnny Ramsay.

"But no more 'rithmetic!" Chuck Morgan cried in mock alarm. "It sure makes my head ache, 'rithmetic does."

They swung away from Farewell and entered a long draw, dark with the purple shadows of the twilight.

"Wasn't there nobody at all in Block's shack?" queried Johnny Ramsay, rolling a cigarette one-handed.

"Three," replied Loudon.

"Huh!" Johnny Ramsay was startled.

"Two was dead an' the third was dyin'," explained Loudon. "He cashed before we come out. His name was Tom Hallaway. You remember about Cutting stealin' my hoss. Well, him an' Block turned up in

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Rocket, an' Cutting was ridin' a blaze-face pinto. Come to find out, the pinto belonged to a fellah named Jim Hallaway, an' Jim was found murdered. The way I figure it: Cutting knowed better'n to ride in on my hoss, so he killed Jim an' took his pony, leavin' my hoss back in the hills some'ers. Later he went back after Ranger, an' sloped with the pair.

"This Tom Hallaway was Jim's brother. The two dead men in the shack was the sheriff an' Cutting. Yeah, Rufe Cutting. It'd been better for him if he'd gone south like the sheriff said he did. Rufe was carved up tremendous, an' Block had been plugged three times. Hallaway got 'em both. Two o' the Farewell boys got him though—through the window. But they didn't live long enough to tell about it. He got them plumb center. Yep, four was Hallaway's tally. He sure paid 'em in full for killin' Jim."

"Which I should say as much," murmured Chuck Morgan admiringly. "He was some man!"

"An' he had to die," said Loudon. "All on account o' them measly skunks. Well, by the time Scotty an' that crowd get through with Farewell a Sunday-school won't be in it with the town."

"Yo're sure whistlin'," said Johnny Ramsay.

THE four pushed their mounts almost to the limit of their strength. At three in the morning they dismounted in a grove of singing pines. The 88 ranch buildings were a bare quarter-mile distant.

They tied their horses and went forward on foot. Their plan was to enter the ranch-house and take Blakely prisoner while he slept. It was a sufficiently foolhardy proceeding, for Blakely was known to be a light sleeper. And there might be more than seven men in the bunk-house. If the scheme miscarried, and Blakely should give the alarm— But the four men wasted little thought on that contingency.

Silently they approached the dark blots that were the ranch buildings. Foot by foot they edged along between the two corrals.

At the blacksmith shop they halted. To the right, and fifty or sixty yards away, was the bunk-house. In front of them stretched the square shape of the ranch-house. Loudon sat down and pulled off his boots. The others followed his example.

"I'm goin' down to the bunk-house first," Loudon whispered. "I can tell by the snores, maybe, how many we've got to count in."

Loudon slid silently toward the bunk-house. In ten minutes he was back.

"Not a snore," he whispered. "I listened at each window. There ain't a sound in that bunk-house. If the boys are gone, then Blakely's gone. There's only one window open in the ranch-house. I didn't hear nothin' there either."

Leaving Johnny on guard at the back door, Loudon and the others tiptoed around the ranch-house. They leaned their rifles against the wall beside the door and Loudon laid his hand on the latch. Slowly he lifted the latch and slowly, very slowly, so that it would not creak, he pushed the door open. Once inside they halted, nerves a-stretch, and ears straining to catch the slightest sound. But there was no sound.

Loudon knew that there were three rooms, an office, and a wide hall in the ranch-house, but where Blakely was in the habit of sleeping he did not know. While Laguerre and Chuck Morgan remained in the hall, Loudon felt his way from room to room.

Still hearing no sound he grew bolder and struck a match. He found himself in the office. In company with the others he visited every room in turn. Each was empty. In one room the flickering matchlight revealed a bed. The blankets were tumbled. An alarm-clock, hanging on a nail above the bed, had stopped at half-past two.

"Blakely left yesterday, all right," said Loudon. "It takes a day an' a half for them clocks to run down. Guess he must 'a' been at Farewell after all."

"Maybe some o' the boys got him," Chuck said hopefully.

"No such luck."

The match went out, and Loudon scratched another, intending to light a lamp.

"Put out that light!" came in a hoarse whisper from the back door. "Somebody's a-comin'."

Loudon crushed the match between his fingers and hurried to the back door. Laguerre and Chuck crowded against him.

"Listen!" commanded Johnny Ramsay.

"Sounds like two horses," said Loudon.

"Comin' the way we come," growled Loudon.

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The hoof-beats, at first a mere ripple of distant sound, grew louder rapidly.

"If they're comin' here, they'll come in the ranch - house, sure," said Loudon. "They're only two, so they must be a couple o' the 88. We'll take 'em alive. Telescope, you an' Chuck take this door, an' Johnny an' I'll take the front. If they come yore way bend yore guns over their heads. Don't shoot till ye know who they are for sure. It's just possible they may be friends."

Loudon and Johnny Ramsay ran through the hall, brought in the rifles, and closed the front door. Side by side they waited. The door was poorly hung. Through the cracks they could hear quite plainly the drum of the galloping horses' feet. Suddenly a horse neighed shrilly.

"Our hosses in the grove!" breathed Loudon. "I forgot 'em, now——"

But the approaching horsemen did not halt. As they came closer Loudon heard one call to the other and the latter make a reply, but the words were unintelligible. They were still talking when they pulled up in front of the ranch-house door.

"I tell ye I don't like that whinnerin'!" one man was insisting angrily. "Maybe, now——"

"Gittin' scared, huh!" sneered the other. "It's just some o' our hosses strayed. They often go over in that bunch o' pines. You take the hosses down to the corral, Pete, an' change the saddles, an' I'll rustle us some grub an' the cartridges. Skip now!"

The speaker lifted the door-latch. The door crashed open. A boot scuffed the door-sill. The heavy barrel of Loudon's six-shooter smashed down across hat and hair with a sickening crunch.

Even as the man dropped, Loudon, taking no chances, flung his arms around the falling body and went down with it. Johnny Ramsay, drawing his own conclusions as to the friendliness of the man with the horses, sprang through the doorway, his six-shooter spitting. In mid-leap he checked, and fell flat, his six-shooter flying from his hand. He was up in an instant and feeling about for his gun. Panting and swearing, for in his ears was the tuckle-tuck-tuckle-tuck of a furiously ridden horse, he found his six-shooter at last.

"Deed you heet heem?" called Laguerre from the doorway.

"I did not," replied Johnny. "Leastwise he didn't wait to tell me. If I hadn't tripped over somebody's feet an' lost my gun in the shuffle, I'd have got him all right. He wasn't five yards away. By the time I got hold o' the gun he was over the hills an' far away, so far as hittin' him was concerned. He left the other sport's hoss, though."

Johnny went up to the horse, a big, light-colored animal, and flung its dragging rein over a post near the door. The horse stood quietly, legs spread, breathing heavily.

"Hey!" bawled Loudon. "Somebody gimme a match! I can't find mine, an' I want to look at Blakely!"

"So eet ees Blakely," said Laguerre. "I deed not know."

"Sure," Loudon said, "I knowed both voices instanter. The other party was that Paradise Bender named Pete O'Leary. Ain't anybody got a match?"

Johnny Ramsay pulled a match out of his hat-band and scratched it. He held the flame above the face of the unconscious man on the floor.

"It's Blakely. No mistake about that," said Loudon in a tone of great satisfaction.

A guttural exclamation from Laguerre drew Loudon's eyes to the half-breed. Laguerre was bending forward, his eyes fixed in a terrible glare on the face of Blakely. Laguerre's lips writhed open. His teeth were bared to the gum. His countenance was a mask of relentless hate.

"Pony George!" almost whispered Laguerre. "At las'!"

The match went out.

"Gimme them matches!" exclaimed Loudon harshly.

He went into the office, found a lamp and lit it. He carried it into the hall and placed it on a chair. Laguerre had squatted down on his heels. His eyes, now mere slits, were still fixed on Blakely. Johnny Ramsay and Chuck Morgan covertly watched Laguerre. They did not understand. Laguerre's head pivoted suddenly.

"Dat man ees mine," he said, staring at Loudon.

"Of course. Ye don't need to say nothin' more, Telescope."

"I weel tell why. Dese odders mus' know. My frien's—" the swarthy face with the terrible eyes turned toward Chuck and Johnny—"my frien's, long tam ago, ovair eas' on de Sweetwatair, I know dees man. She was not call Blakely den. Hees name was Taylor—Pony George, dey call

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heem. Pony George she keel my wife, my leetle Marie. Feefteen year I have hunt Pony George. Now I have foun' heem. Un I weel keel heem, me."

Johnny and Chuck nodded gravely. The primitive code of the broken lands is bluntly simple. Vengeance was Laguerre's.

CHAPTER XXV

TRAIL'S END

"SHOOT me! Hang me! I don't care. Only don't turn me over to that devil there. He'll torture me! For God's sake, don't do it! I'll confess! I'll tell ye all I ever done. I an' my outfit's been rustling them cows from the Bar-S an' the Cross-in-a-box. We've done it for years!

"We used to hold the cows in a blind cañon south o' Smoky Peak till the brands healed. There's more'n a hundred cows there now! They're Hawg Pen an' Cross-in-a-box an' Bar-S cows! An' we rustled Scotty Mackenzie's hosses while Skinny Maxson o' Marysville toled ye away up to Hatchet Creek, an' 'twas me shot Scotty. I'd 'a' done for him only I thought he was dead. An' I sent Rufe Cutting to the Flying M so he could help us when the time come! Pete O'Leary the same way! He was with me tonight. D'je get him?"

"No, we didn't," replied Loudon. "It's no use a-takin' on thisaway. We trailed the hosses to Piegan City, an' Archer an' the Maxson boys are under arrest. Ye see how it is. We know all about you an' yore gang. We can't do nothin' for ye."

"But ye don't know all I done myself!" Blakely pursued wildly. "I tell ye, I'd ought to be hung! I'd ought to be hung ten times over. It was me shot Johnny Ramsay that time he found the dead Bar-S cow an' her calf on our range. An' I tried to get you, Loudon, when ye was snuffin' 'round that ledge on Pack-saddle where we used to throw the cows across. An' I thought up that scheme for makin' ye out a rustler with them Crossed Dumbbell cows. I done it, I tell ye! Can't ye understand? Hang me! Oh, please hang me, gents!"

Blakely, fairly gibbering with fear, crawled on his knees toward Loudon. Blakely's hands were bound behind his back. The drying blood from the scalp-wound, inflicted by the barrel of Loudon's six-shooter, had stiffened his black hair into upstanding matted masses. He was a wretched spectacle.

"Loudon! Loudon!" shrieked Blakely. "It was me swore out that warrant for ye for stealin' the chestnut I sold ye. I sent the sheriff up the Bend after ye, an' I'd 'a' hanged ye sure as —— if I'd ever laid hands on ye. Now hang me! Hang me quick, an' get it over with!"

"Telescope!" exclaimed Loudon. "I guess we'll go down to the corrals."

When Blakely perceived that there was no hope for him, that his was to be no easy death, he went frantic. Hysteria seized him. He sobbed, laughed, and uttered the most blood-chilling screams, his body thrashing about like a shark in its death-throes.

Laguerre, sitting cross-legged on the floor, had been whetting his skinning-knife on his boot-leg for the past half-hour. Now he held up the knife and thumbed the broad blade.

Loudon and the others, their eyes averted, passed out of the ranch-house into the pale light of dawn. The morning star blazed diamond-bright above the lemon-yellow splendor in the east. A little wind blew past their faces. The air was fresh with the promise of the new day. They drew long, grateful breaths and looked from under their eyebrows at each other.

"I feel sick," Johnny Ramsay said frankly.

The horse which Johnny had tied to the post had been lying down. It rose with a heave and a plunge and stood blowing and cracking its nostrils.

"Well, if there ain't Telescope's gray," announced Loudon. "So the fellahs we chased out o' Farewell was Blakely an' O'Leary after all. They sure picked the best hosses in the corral when they took Brown Jug an' the gray. No wonder we couldn't catch 'em."

"Yo're right," Johnny and Chuck chorused loudly.

"Life's a funny thing," Loudon rambled on, speaking quite rapidly. "Here we run our legs off after them two fellahs, an' they turn 'round an' come back to us all prompt an' unexpected. I guess I'll water that hoss an' take his saddle off."

He turned back. The others crawled up on the corral fence.

"Wish I'd thought o' the hoss," grumbled Johnny. "I want somethin' to do."

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With shaking fingers he rolled a cigarette and spilled most of the tobacco. The clamor within the ranch-house suddenly became louder.

"He sure takes it hard," muttered Chuck Morgan, repressing a shudder with difficulty.

Loudon slid around the corner of the ranch-house and joined them on the top rail.

"Thought ye was goin' to water the hoss," said Chuck.

"Telescope's goin' to use him," said Loudon, and endeavored to whistle "The Zebra Dun."

"I'm kind o' glad to know who did plug me that time," remarked Johnny.

"I've always knowed who done it," Loudon said. "I dug a forty-five bullet out o' Blakely's swell-fork the day we had the run-in at the Bar-S."

"Why didn't ye tell me?" demanded Johnny.

"The bullet wasn't proof, when ye come right down to it. No use o' yore lockin' horns with Blakely anyway. It wouldn't 'a' done no good."

"Well, it don't—Hellen' blazes! Hear him yell!"

Loudon began to swear under his breath. A door banged suddenly. Blakely's insane shrieking abruptly stilled. Soon the three men heard the trample of the gray's feet. Then, beyond the ranch-house, appeared Laguerre. He was mounted. Face downward across his lap lay Blakely, gagged with his own holster and silk neckerchief.

Riding at a walk, Laguerre headed toward the grove of singing pines where they had left their horses. When Brown Jug and his double burden disappeared among the trees Loudon drew a long breath.

"I ain't in a bit of a hurry for my hoss," he declared.

"Which I should say not!" Johnny Ramsay exclaimed with fervor.

The sun was an hour high when Laguerre loped out of the grove. He was leading their four horses. They watched him with morbid fascination.

Laguerre rode up to the corral and halted. The gray, hard held, shook his head. On the right cheek-piece of the horse's bridle a black-haired scalp flapped soggily. And Laguerre smiled up at the three men on the top rail of the corral.

"No use hangin' round here no more," said Loudon, slipping to the ground. "Might as well mosey over to that blind cañon south of Smoky Peak an' see if them cattle really are there."

THREE days later Loudon and his comrades, their horses drooping-headed and heavy-legged, rode into Farewell. Signs of the late skirmish were plentiful. There was not a whole pane of glass in any of the buildings which had served as forts; and doors, façades, and window-casings were pock-marked with bullet-holes.

Bill Lainey, consistent always, was dozing under the wooden awning of his hotel. Awakened, the hotel-keeper solemnly shook hands all around and wheezed that it was a fine day.

"Yeah," said Loudon, "the air round these parts does seem clearer a lot. An' there ain't so many folks on the street either."

"There won't be for a while," declared Bill Lainey. "We buried twenty-three gents day before yesterday, hanged twelve up the road apiece, an' Scotty an' Jack Richie an' that crowd rubbed out nine o' the boys that slid out o' the Happy Heart over by Dead Horse Spring."

"How many got away?" inquired Johnny Ramsay.

" 'Bout twenty — twenty-four maybe," replied the hotel-keeper. "I dunno for sure. But anyhow the 88 outfit is shot full o' holes. Eleven of 'em cashed here in town, an' seven was got outside o' town. The rest made it safe, I guess."

"Was they all here before the riot?" queried Loudon.

"Every last one of 'em, 'ceptin' Rudd an' Marvin. They come in a-huntin' trouble. They've been sore 'count o' Mike Flynn's sassin' the sheriff an' darin' him an' the 88 to lock horns with him. Well, there was a gent in town that day, dunno who he was, but anyhow when Rufe Cutting went into the sheriff's shack the stranger went in, too. Oh, you seen the inside o' the shack, did ye? Well, it was what the stranger done started things a-rollin'. Two o' the deputies plugged him through the window, an' the rest of us wouldn't stand no such actions as that, so we started. Good thing you gents an' Jack Richie an' the others happened along when ye did."

"Any o' our boys get it?"

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"Long Riley an' Masters o' the Cross-in-a-box went out here in town, an' three fellers, Newhall an' Lane o' Paradise Bend, an' Morton o' the Flyin' M, in the battle at Dead Horse. Our tally was more. We lost seven of our best citizens. Four of 'em died right here in my hotel—two in the dining-room, one at the door, an' one in the kitchen. There's quite a jag o' gents nicked an' creased, but the doc says they'll pull through all right."

"But look here, Bill, has Rufe Cutting been holin' out over at the 88 right along?"

"I dunno how long he's been there, Tom, but anyway he rid in with half-a-dozen o' the 88 'bout two weeks ago, an' he was with 'em when they all come in for their battle."

"Do ye remember what Rufe rode for a hoss the first time he come in?"

"Bald-face pinto—both times."

"I was wonderin'," Loudon said. "Ye see, Bill, Rufe stole my hoss, Ranger, up in Paradise Bend, an' the mornin' o' the fight here the little hoss turns up at the Cross-in-a-box. It ain't none likely Rufe brought him. I'm tryin' to figger out the mystery."

Bill Lainey's fat body shook with laughter. He gripped his sides and panted for breath.

"That explains it," he wheezed. "It was yore hoss that the 88 was fussin' round after."

"What are ye talkin' about?" demanded Loudon.

"Why, it's thisaway, Tom. When Blakely an' his gang come in they scampered round a-pokin' into every corral in town. Said one o' their hosses had been stole five days before, an' they was out to find the pony an' the thief. I didn't pay no attention, 'cept to see they didn't take one o' my hosses by mistake. Ye see, I allowed they was lyin' all along an' just huntin' any old excuse to unhook their artillery. Yore hoss! Well, if that ain't rich!"

"It must 'a' been my hoss," averred Loudon solemnly. "I guess now Rufe might have been anxious to get him back—some."

"Yeah," cut in Johnny Ramsay, "but who stole him from the 88? Guess the mystery's thicker'n ever, Tom."

"Looks like it," agreed Loudon. "Scotty or any of 'em in town now, Bill?"

"Scotty ain't. Him an' the Flyin' M bunch have rode south—Damson, I heard Mike Flynn say. Jack Richie's around some'ers. Here he comes now!"

"Which I'd sure admire to know where you fellers went," exclaimed Jack Richie, his expression radiating relief. "I was bettin' ye'd been bushwhacked, but Scotty he said no, ye was more likely bushwhackin' somebody else, an' ye'd all turn up like plugged dollars bimeby. By the looks of that led horse Scotty had ye sized up right. Who'd ye gather in?"

"Blakely," Loudon replied quietly.

At this juncture Richie perceived the scalp on the gray's bridle.

"I see," said Jack Richie. "Run across any one else?"

"Fellah named O'Leary—ye don't know him. He got away. We was at the 88 at the time. Before—before Blakely went he confessed to a whole raft o' stuff. We followed up part o' what he said, an' over in a blind cañon south o' Smoky Peak in the Three Sisters we found a hundred an' twenty Bar-S, Hawg Pen, an' Cross-in-a-box cows. Some o' the brands was almost healed up, but there was enough that wasn't to tell where they come from. There wasn't nobody with 'em."

"Smoky Peak, huh? Hoofs shaved down, I s'pose?"

"Sure," replied Loudon. "They won't be able to travel under two weeks."

"Did ye tell Old Salt the joyful news—about the cattle?"

"I'll send him word."

"He's down at Mike Flynn's now. Go an' make him happy. But first c'mon in an' irrigate. If we don't do it right away, Johnny'll faint. His tongue's hangin' out a foot."

"I'll see ye later. Guess I'd better tell Old Salt first."

Loudon did not feel particularly cheerful as he walked down the street. His work was done—and well done. His enemies were either no more or journeying swiftly elsewhere. There was peace for honest men in Fort Creek County at last. But there was no peace in Loudon's soul. He was learning for the second time that forgetfulness comes not easily.

IN FRONT of the Blue Pigeon Store a buckboard was standing. The rangy vehicle and its team of ponies struck a chord in Loudon's memory. He had seen them recently. Where? Idly

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speculating he entered the Blue Pigeon. Mr. Saltoun, leaning over the counter, was talking to Mike Flynn.

"Ahoy, Tom!" bawled Mike Flynn, thrusting forward his immense, freckled paw. "'Tis a sight for sore eyes ye are. Glory be, but I thought ye kilt!"

Mr. Saltoun's greeting was less enthusiastic, but it was friendly. Loudon sat down on the counter and swung his spurred heels.

"About them cattle now," he said slowly, his eyes fixed on Mr. Saltoun's face. "Ye remember I told ye the 88 was rustlin' 'em?"

Mr. Saltoun nodded.

"I remember," he said.

"Them cows," Loudon said distinctly, "are in a blind cañon south o' Smoky Peak, along with Hawg Pen an' Cross-in-a-box cattle. That is, most of 'em are there. The rest ye'll have to pick out o' the 88 herds, I guess."

Mr. Saltoun's capitulation was instant and handsome.

"You was right!" he exclaimed warmly, holding out his hand. "You was right all along. I sure had the 88 sized up wrong, an'—" vigorously pumping Loudon's hand —"any time ye want a job there's one at the Bar-S for ye. Er—my range-boss is quittin' next month. What do ye say to his job?"

"Now that's right good hearin'," replied Loudon, "but I guess I'll stick with the Flyin' M awhile. Thank ye just as much."

"Oh, that's all right. Any time ye feel like makin' a change, why, ye know where to come. Well, I got to be goin'. Say, Mike, don't forget to order them collars for my buckboard harness."

"I sure won't. So long."

Loudon followed Mr. Saltoun into the street.

"Somethin' new, ain't it?" queried Loudon, flicking a thumb at the buckboard.

"Yep," said Mr. Saltoun, gathering up the reins. "Bought team an' all a month ago from Shaner o' the Three Bars. Got 'em cheap, too. Judge Allison was after 'em, but I got 'em. Huh? What did ye say?"

"I didn't say nothin'. Somethin' stuck in my throat. Well, so long, take care o' yoreself."

Loudon stood on the sidewalk gazing after the dwindling buckboard. The mention of Judge Allison had supplied the missing link in the chain of memory. He had seen that buckboard, driven by a woman, stop in front of Judge Allison's house in Marysville, and it had been considerably less than a month ago. Hence, at the time, the buckboard must have been the property of Mr. Saltoun. And Kate was the only woman at the Bar-S ranch. The driver must have been Kate Saltoun, then. Why should Kate call on Judge Allison?

"*Shershay la fam*," the judge had remarked in explanation of his rather bald espousal of Loudon's cause. "Find the woman." Did the judge mean Kate, and was it because of Kate's visit that he had become Loudon's friend? It did not seem possible, yet, if Kate actually had pleaded for him, it was on a par with her actions in Paradise Bend.

Loudon, pondering the matter, stood quite still, utterly oblivious to his surroundings. The sudden creak of wheels, a familiar tinny clatter, and a cry of "Howdy, Tom!" brought him out of his reverie with a jerk.

He looked up. Ten feet distant, Captain Burr, on the seat of his pedler's wagon, regarded him with kindly eyes.

"Wool-gatherin', Tom?" said the lean little man, waggling his white beard. "I'm su'prised."

"I was just a-wonderin'," Loudon said, forcing a smile, "whether we was goin' to have rain or not."

"I shouldn't wondeh," Captain Burr remarked, gravely staring up into the cloudless blue. "I've just come in from the Bah-S," he continued abruptly. "Miss Kate has two right soah hands. Right soah, they ah. I sold the young lady some salve."

"Sore hands," repeated Loudon stupidly. "Why, I—I heard her thumb was tore pretty bad, but—but I didn't know both of 'em was hurt."

"Yes, the young lady's right thumb has quite a gash, and the palm of her left hand is cut all the way across. She cut it on a rock!"

"Cut it on a rock?"

"On a rock! She was comin' out o' the house, she said, and she tripped on the doorsill and fell. Fell pretty heavy. Her hand was sho' cut quite a lot."

"Lemme get this straight. Ye say she cut her left hand, an' on a rock?"

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"Yes, Tom," said Captain Burr gently, "that's the how of it."

Without a word Loudon turned and fled. Five minutes later, mounted on Bill Lainey's toughest horse, he was galloping out of Farewell. Two miles out he passed Mr. Saltoun. The latter called to him but received no response save a hand-wave.

"Well," observed Mr. Saltoun, "if he's changed his mind about that job, he's sure actin' mighty odd."

AN HOUR and a half from the time he left Farewell Loudon halted his staggering pony in front of the Bar-S ranch-house. In the hammock on the porch sat Kate Saltoun. Her face was rather white, and there were dark shadows beneath her black eyes.

Loudon sucked in his breath sharply at the sight of the poor bandaged hands. Kate sat motionless, her gaze level, her face without expression. Loudon felt like a stranger.

"Kate," he began, "Kate," and stopped.

"Well," said Kate at last.

Released from the spell of those chilling eyes, Loudon found his tongue.

"I come to have a little talk with ye," he said. "Ye see I've been findin' out things lately. You drove over to Marysville an' talked to Judge Allison on my account, didn't ye?"

"Who told you?" Kate did not raise her head.

"Nobody told me. But I ain't a fool. I seen the Bar-S buckboard in Marysville, an' a woman was drivin', an' the judge said, '*Shershay la fam*,' meanin' 'Find the woman.' Well, yo're the woman all right. I know ye are. An' that cut left hand ye didn't get by trippin' over the doorsill like ye told Cap'n Burr. Ye got it by fallin' on a rock back o' the Cross-in-a-box ranch-house after ye'd tied Ranger to the post. Ye can't tell me different.

"Yore cut hand, an' yore knowin' that I'd be at the Cross-in-a-box, an' the way it was done an' all, makes it certain. Ye gave me my hoss back. An' ye paid Rudd to get him for ye. Ranger was at the 88 all right. An' ye couldn't 'a' got hold o' him 'cept through somebody like Rudd. No wonder ye stuck by Rudd! It was the only thing ye could do, 'specially when he'd saved yore life, too."

"He didn't save my life. I thought if I told you that he had, you might let him go. I lied. I'd have told any number of lies to save him. He was a horse-thief, and he and Marvin tried to prove you a rustler, but he trusted me. You wouldn't take my word when I asked you to, but Rudd did when he brought me Ranger and I didn't have the full amount I'd promised him. I told him that I'd bring the money three days later in the draw where the sumac bushes grow, and he believed me and he led Ranger all the way to that lonesome spruce grove on Cow Creek where I wanted to keep the horse till I could return him to you. After that I couldn't desert Rudd. I couldn't have lived with myself if I had."

"I know. I should 'a' took yore word, but—well, anyhow I should 'a' took it an' let it go at that. I owe everythin' to ye. Ye took care o' me in Paradise Bend. Ye worked for me, an' it was yore doin' that, that made findin' Scotty's hosses almost a cinch. Ye went an' got Hockling an' Red when the deputies jumped us over near Pack-saddle.

"Ye done it all, you did, an' I'm here to tell ye I'm a dog, an' I ain't fit to saddle yore hoss. I can't thank ye. Thanks don't mean nothin' 'side o' what ye done for me. But—but how much besides the sixty did ye pay Rudd? I can settle that, anyhow."

"It doesn't matter in the least," said Kate, her eyes still on the floor.

"It does matter. It matters a lot. I've got to know. I can't——"

"Listen," interrupted Kate, flinging up her head and meeting his gaze squarely, "I'm going to tell you something. Once upon a time you told me you loved me. I treated you very badly. Later I was sorry, and I did everything in my power to make amends. I even told you I loved you. I loved you with all my heart and soul and body. I could have made you happy as no other woman on earth could have made you happy. Well, that's over. I've learned my lesson."

"Kate! Kate! I do love ye—I do! I do!"

Loudon's hat was under his feet. His long body was trembling.

"You do, do you?" said Kate, her voice icy. "Then perhaps I can make you suffer as you made me suffer. I don't believe I can, but I'll try. I don't love you! Do you understand? I don't love you!"

"Then—then why did ye go to the judge? Why did ye get my hoss? Why——"

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"Why? Because I wanted you, if such a thing were possible, to go through life in my debt. You won't forget me now. And I'm glad—glad!"

"Then why did ye walk in the water if ye wanted me to know I owed ye so much? Why did ye wear boots too big for ye to make me think it was a man brought Ranger to Cross-in-a-box? Why did ye go to Marysville all wrapped up, so nobody'd know ye? What ye say don't hang together."

"Doesn't it? I'm sorry. You'd have found out about the judge and Ranger before a great while. I'd have seen to it that you did. I merely didn't care to have you know about these things at the time."

"I guess I understand," Loudon muttered. "I'll—I'll send ye Ranger. Ye've done bought him. He's yores. I'll go now."

"Oh, don't bother about Ranger— Look out!"

So engrossed had been the two that neither had heard the gallop of an approaching horse till it shot around the corner of the house and was almost upon them. As Kate shrieked her warning she sprang from the hammock and flung herself in front of Loudon. For the man on the horse was Pete O'Leary, and he was apparently aiming a six-shooter at Loudon.

"You —— spy!" yelled O'Leary.

Even as O'Leary's six-shooter cracked, Loudon swept Kate to one side and fired from the hip. O'Leary swayed, dropped his gun, then pitched forward over his saddle-horn. Loudon ran to him. As he reached O'Leary the latter rolled over on his back.

"Teach her to spy on my letters!" he gasped. "If it hadn't been for her I——"

He choked and died.

Loudon thrust his six-shooter into its holster and turned. Kate, her lips colorless, her eyes dilated, was clinging to one of the porch-uprights. Loudon crossed the intervening space in two leaps.

"Where ye hit?" he cried.

"I'm not hit," she replied shakily. "But —but did he—did you—are you hurt?"

"I ain't even creased. Now ye go in the house an' stay. Here come Jimmie an' Rainey. We'll take care o' what's out there."

Obediently Kate went into the house.

Half an hour later, in the living-room, Loudon found her. She rose from her chair at his entrance and faced him in silence. The cold, defiant expression had vanished from her face. In its stead was the look of a frightened child. Loudon halted within a yard of her.

"Kate," said he, "ye can say what ye like about yore reasons for goin' to Judge Allison an' takin' that night-ride to the Cross-in-a-box, an' I've got to believe ye. But if ye don't love me why did ye jump in front o' me when O'Leary fired?"

"I thought he was going to shoot you," she replied, forcing herself to meet his eyes. "I—I didn't know I was the one till I heard him say so."

"Ye thought he was goin' to drop me, an' ye jumped in front o' me; why?"

Kate's face was upturned. Her lips parted. Her body swayed toward him.

"Take me!" she cried. "Oh, take me!"

"Why did ye say what ye did about wantin' to make me suffer when ye loved me all the time?"

"I couldn't help it. I thought I'd lost you, and then you came, and—and then I wanted to hurt you, and I did. I don't know what I'd have done if you'd gone away. For I love you, boy!"

Loudon held her close as the dark head snuggled against his shoulder.

"I know," said he soberly.

"I guess," murmured Kate, "I've always loved you. I must have. I—I hate myself when I think of—of Blakely.

"I found out what he was while he was lying here wounded. He was delirious and he spoke of a woman, another man's wife, named Marie, down on the Sweetwater. Oh, it was awful—what he said. I can't tell you. It—it woke me up. Then I knew what I had lost when you left the ranch. You'll never leave me again, will you?"

"O' course I won't!"

It was a large wedding for the Lazy River country.

Scotty Mackenzie privately informed Jack Richie that he didn't know, the marriage might turn out all right, but Kate was such a good-looker, and he'd always mistrusted good-lookers himself.

Scotty's pessimism was pardonable. He had lost a good employee, while Mr. Saltoun was the gainer by an excellent range-boss.

THE END

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THE HARP ON THE BARBED WIRE FENCE

by William H. Hamby

BUSH DENNY galloped his horse at a reckless gait down the ridge road, the bridle-rein in his right hand, his hat on the saddle-horn, and a fiddle under his left arm.

It was long past midnight. The moonlight slithered through the moving leaves across the gravelly road. A solitary bank of white clouds in the east discharged heat lightning. Stillness sat on the Huckleberry Hills and brooded in the little dark valleys between. The clatter of the horse's hoofs might be heard a mile.

On the hillside below and lapping over into the narrow valley of Little Bear Creek was a patch of cleared land; the dark splotch at the edge was old Zeb Williams's cabin.

Bush let out his voice, a voice that echoed from three hills:

There was an old soldier who had a wooden leg,
He had no tobacco and had for to beg.
Another old soldier kept saving up his rocks
And always had tobacco in his old tobacco-box.

Said the first old soldier, "Will you give me a chew?"
Said the second old soldier, "I'll be darned if I do.
If you'll quit drinking whisky and save up your rocks
You'll always have tobacco in your own tobacco-box."

"Whoo—ah——Whoo—ah—Whoo!"

The young man threw back his head and laughed, twisted his face and mimicked old Zeb as he turned over in bed.

"Gol darn it, there goes that good-for-nothin' Denny hoodlum. He'll be in the Pen, if his dad don't look out."

He sang "Joe Bowers" as he passed Betsy Denton's cabin—Betsy of the sour visage and malignant tongue. Again, Bush mimicked what he knew was happening in the cabin:

"Oh, Lordy! I'm awake again. Drat that Denny boy! He ain't worth his salt to nobody, and he pesters the life out of decent folks. He's goin' to hell as fast as ever he can go; and I don't care how soon he gits there."

The road turned down into the valley, and the horse took the steep decline without checking his gallop, the gravel flying from his beating hoofs. A house by the road, a frame house this time, and Bush broke into—

Oh, that gal, that pretty little gal,
That gal I left behind me.

As he finished he looked up and smiled at the moon over the Huckleberry Hills. "It's Bush coming home from the dance," he repeated, "and I love to hear him sing on the road." It was Elijah Craig's house. Elijah, of all the people in the community, liked Bush Denny, and "The Girl I Left Behind Me" was his favorite song.

Bush was the troubadour of the Huckleberry Hills. In that remote settlement of the Ozark mountains the inhabitants were solemn, reckless and religious. The fathers believed strongly in the ten commandments and work—for their children.

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When the men slipped off to shooting-matches, horse-races and fish-fries, they left the boys in the field, for work was good for them. But Jim Denny, who had the best farm on Big Bear Creek, violated all the hill codes for governing boys. He did the work and let Bush, his only son, do the fiddling.

Bush grew up in his own way. Worked when he felt like it, fished when he liked, rode the hills at his will, and attended every dance within twenty miles. He never had a music-lesson, never heard a real musician play or sing, and yet he played and sang by instinct, and with tremendous fire at times.

Bush was twenty-two, tall and lithe, with heavy black hair, large dark eyes, and a mouth that changed expression with every mood.

Other hill youths looked on him with envy, and the hill maidens looked on him with warmer personal feelings. But most of their elders agreed he was sure of the gallows or the penitentiary—at best the poor-house. And there was perfect unanimity of opinion as to where he would be after he passed this vale of tears.

IT WAS ten o'clock next morning when Bush harnessed a team and joined his father in plowing corn in the west field.

"Guess I must have overslept," remarked Bush as they passed each other in the middle of the field.

Jim Denny squinted his eye at the sun.

"A little mite late, I reckon," he remarked, and plowed on. But after he was by, a smile was pulling at the wrinkles beside his mild-tempered mouth.

All Spring Bush rode harder, and was out later, and worked less than ever before. He was restless. The fiddle did not satisfy him. The weird, midnight outbreaks on the hill roads, the daredevil riding and hallooing, did not appease the something unnamed and not understood in him. The too open admiration of the hill girls no longer flattered him. He was restless.

One night in June he saddled his horse. As he started to mount, he hesitated. His father had come in from the harvest field that evening not feeling very well.

Bush threw the rein over the gate-post and went in. Jim Denny was sitting on the porch, his chair tipped back against the wall.

Bush sat down on the step, his hat on his knee, a little uneasy and embarrassed. His mother had been dead a great many years. Bush and his sister were all the children.

"Feeling all right?" He did not look toward his father.

"I'm all right, Bush. Go on." Jim Denny spoke with unusual brusqueness.

Bush rode off with his fiddle under his arm. The dance that night was on Little Bear Creek, ten miles across the hills.

His father was still in the chair leaning against the wall when he returned at three o'clock in the morning.

Of even more interest among the neighbors than the funeral itself was—

"What will Bush do now?"

The sister who had kept house for them married a week after.

Bush sold the farm the next day, including the stock and all the household furniture, put his share of the money—twenty-eight hundred dollars—in his hip pocket, took his fiddle under his arm and walked eighteen miles to the railroad.

II

ACCORDING to all the law and the prophets—the law of thumb-nail psychology and Huckleberry Hill prophets—there was only one possible destination for Bush Denny. He would take the first train for the city, and through one week of vermilion splurges scatter the twenty-eight hundred dollars along the phosphorescent way that ends in blue funk at the city jail.

If human beings only acted according to fixed rules of cause and effect, how easy to classify and corral them! We would get from the neighbors a catalog of their past, and know exactly what they were coming to.

Bush Denny, the troubadour, the light of work, the insurgent, restless spirit, bought a ticket for Kansas.

The fever to hear and see and know music and glitter and jollity out in the big world burned hotter in his veins than ever. But not every one with a temperament is a spendthrift, nor every one with a big emotion will squander ten years of the future for ten minutes of the present. Bush was an economist. He would prepare for the big time coming. Twenty-eight hundred would not go far—then where would he be? Before he saw the world he must make some money.

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Bush had thought this all out as he walked that eighteen miles. A definite purpose had formed. There was only one thing he knew how to do—farm.

He had no education beyond the eight grades of the country school. He knew no trade. There was no money farming the hill patch eighteen miles from the market. He had seen that years before. There was a living, but it was not Bush's sort of living. There was no music nor mirth in it.

Bush had read a good deal. He knew more of the world than a great many people who lived out in it. There seemed to him one chance to make a lot of money farming, and that was in raising wheat in Kansas. Bush had eagerly absorbed a good deal of the excellent press-agent literature that enterprising state had been sending out.

Three times he stopped and priced land. Each time the price was far above his means and he kept going west. The thinner the rain-belt, the cheaper grew the land.

At last far over to the western edge he found land he could buy for seven dollars an acre. He bought two hundred acres—thirty miles from the nearest town. They told him that not more than once in four years could one count on a full wheat crop out there.

Very well, he'd take the gamble. It might come the first year. If it did not, then it would come the second or third. One good crop on two hundred acres would mean five thousand dollars. He'd sell then, and buy again where rains were sure. After that he'd get rich fast—so fast that all the money he needed would be his while he was yet under thirty.

It was a long time to wait—a hard road—he knew all that. But mountain muscle is tough; and sometimes in other lands than France a light heart may cover a grim determination.

Bush built a one-room shack—hauled the lumber thirty miles; banked the dirt half-way up around it, to keep it warm; laid in the Winter's provisions and began to build fence.

By the twentieth of August he had driven posts and strung two strands of barbed wire around the two hundred acres. He had bought a team and a plow. It was wild land that never had been broken. He would begin turning it in the morning.

Bush sat on the door-sill of the shack. It was a still night, still save for the faint moan of the incessant wind, and the crinkle of the dead grass. The stars lighted the dim spaces into which his eyes could look until they ached.

It was fifteen miles to the nearest neighbor. Few men had been hardy enough to fight it out with the bleak prairie and the recurring dry years. Over on the river they grew rich growing alfalfa. But back here on the high, windy slope, where the lift of the Rockies was already felt—here on the dry swell of barren grass land—only jackrabbits and coyotes found it homelike.

Bush was lonesome. He had not seen a human being for two weeks. He had been to town but once in a month, and then only to the store and back.

The familiar hills, the trees with their cool shades beneath, the clear, gurgling springs, the familiar faces, the frolic in the cabins—it might have been his indefinitely if he had stayed, or would go back.

Homesickness unspeakable gathered in his heart. Every turn of the road, every grassy field and wild flower, scenes he had scarcely noticed at the time, came up before him, vanished, and only the prairie with its dead grass and incessant woofing wind, and the glittering stars.

Bush went in and brought out his fiddle. He tuned it, drew the bow, and struck into "Oh, that gal, that pretty little gal."

He rose, walked across the barren yard to the new-made barbed-wire fence, lifted the fiddle high in both hands and crashed it down over the top of a fence-post.

In the door of the shack he looked back. There it hung, splintered and mute over the sharp post, a jest to the careless wind that mockingly slipped over it.

He turned and went in.

III

BUSH DENNY'S first caller came the fifth of October, the day he finished sowing wheat.

He was on the last lap with the drill when a man on foot straddled over the barbed wire on the west side and cut across the field to head him off on the return trip.

"Hello!" called Bush, as he stopped his drill by the visitor.

"Hello!" responded the fellow. His shirt and overalls looked as if he had been on a long pilgrimage and forgot the soap. He had sore eyes and a sick 'possum grin.

"Neighbor, you got any terbacker?"

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Bush knew his kind even before he spoke. He was the sort of fellow who sometimes borrows meal and bacon, and always borrows tobacco.

"I don't chew," said Denny; it was plug-tobacco the fellow was after. "Live around here?" he asked indifferently. He did not like him.

"Yep—took up a place about seven miles beyond here. Fellow been living in a dug-out, but guess he dried up and blowed away. So I took possession. How you fixed for bacon?"

"I have a little," replied Bush. "Come on to the house, and I'll give you a chunk."

"Your name's Denny, ain't it?" said the borrower on the way to the shack.

"Yes."

"I knowed your pa back in Tennessee."

"I guess not. My pa never lived back in Tennessee."

"Wasn't his name Bob Denny?"

"No."

"Then it was your uncle I knowed."

Bush gave no further family history.

"My name is Finley—Asa Finley."

Bush gave him a generous strip of bacon and a half-pound of coffee.

"You've got a pretty good house," said Finley, looking around. "Reckon you don't need a pardner—to do the cooking and look after chores?"

"I should say not!" Bush retorted with emphasis. Just a look at the fellow turned his stomach.

He shuffled off across the prairie, his bacon under his arm.

"And that's my nearest neighbor," remarked Bush to himself. "Nice Winter I got ahead of me!"

Bush had paid fourteen hundred for the land, and had spent a thousand for his shack, fences, team, seed and tools. It left him four hundred. Plenty, if luck was with him on his first crop.

IT RAINED the middle of October. The wheat came up quickly, green and fresh, eager as only plants can be when they spring up in a semi-desert at the first moisture.

Bush watched that two hundred acres of wheat with a new feeling. It was more than a sense of possession—it was a feeling of creation. By sweat, and grit, and loneliness he had made those million blades grow on this wide, barren prairie.

The Winter passed. It was the sort of Winter no one wants to remember, the sort Bush hoped some time to forget. Blizzards, and cutting winds that howled through the night and whined through the day. A Winter of desolate loneliness—homesickness that amounted to soul-sickness. Only that smothered fire inside him—a fire that crackled and snapped at times, and threatened to break out and burn up every stake and cord by which he had fastened himself to this task.

In the nights he dreamed of his fiddle. He walked the streets of beautiful cities, and stopped before great portals, and heard strange and wonderful music. There were lights and color and the sounds of merriment.

The world called him. But he could not answer—not now. He had hung his harp on the barbed-wire fence, and the earth must yield him riches before it could yield him glory and pleasures.

The Spring came. The wheat lifted up its little green banners. The roots bunched out. The ground was covered. It rained more. The wheat grew from day to day. He watched it with an anxiety that amounted almost to sickness, for Hessian fly, for chinch-bug, for rust. Nothing happened to it. It was knee-high and began to "boot."

The fifth of May, Bush stood at his shack door and watched the sun set red in the West. The light was upon his wheat, his two hundred acres of beautiful wheat. And the papers predicted it would be a dollar a bushel.

The prairie wind ran down the long field, and the blades bent, rose and fell before it. Ah, that was silent music! He had hung his harp on the barbed-wire fence and it came up wheat and riches, and music undreamed of.

One more rain, and it would be made.

The rain never came. Instead, it turned exceedingly hot, and then dry wind came from over dry, barren deserts to the southwest.

The wheat stood valiantly for a while. A little of it headed out. Then it wilted—and dried—and the wind mocked through the dead stalks.

FINLEY came over to borrow—beans, or bread, or anything. He was still the only man Bush knew. He went but seldom to town and knew no one there but the storekeeper who

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sold him his supplies. Bush spent his idle time reading, listening to the wind, watching the stars, and thinking. He had a little garden-patch which he watered from his well—drew the water up in a bucket by hand.

The sight of Finley had grown more and more distasteful to him. The soiled shirt he wore always made him want to beat the fellow. A queer freak, thought Bush too, for he had not always been so particularly offended by the unwashed. But there was something about Finley so—so sickening, so sneaking and mean. He hated him.

"Look here!" He turned ferociously on the sore-eyed, battered neighbor when his requests were made. "I am going to give you a gallon of beans and a half sack of flour. That is the last. Don't you ever come on my place again. If you ever do, I'm going to beat you until you'll look like a spring-tooth harrow has been over you."

Finley took the beans and the hint, and never came again.

This being the second year of drought, half of the scattering settlers left. Bush now had no neighbor nearer than eighteen miles, and he never went to them.

His seed wheat that Fall cost him two hundred dollars. He had lived a year on a hundred and twenty-five. It left him seventy-five to live on until the next crop. From his garden he got a little help. He pastured the horses on the dried wheat, and managed to buy a little corn.

The next year the wheat did not promise so well, but turned out better. Part of it could be harvested. He got six hundred bushels. Which, after seed was saved, sold for enough to pay harvesting and threshing expenses and leave him two hundred and thirty dollars.

He could get along on that another year. He felt encouraged. The fight was not done yet. Luck would come his way, and then. . .

A WINTER of waiting; a Spring when no rain fell. The wheat, four inches high, died in the furrows of the drill.

It was July and his money was gone. If he could get no credit, he was at the end.

He saddled a horse and rode off in the cool of the night to Belman, the little town thirty miles away. It had been two months since he had been to town. Twenty miles from his place, ten miles from Belman, a new claim had been fenced and a small house built back two hundred yards from the road.

"Poor devil," said Bush with grim pity, "going to get rich raising wheat, I suppose?"

At Belman the man who had sold him supplies for three years was awfully sorry—credit was impossible. In fact, unless he could get cash some way himself, he would have to close. The people were leaving by the scores, leaving broken and in debt.

He went to Bartlett, the one real-estate man in Belman.

"I want to borrow some money on my place—just enough to make another crop," Bush said. "There's bound to be a good year some time. I believe it will be next year."

Bartlett ran his thumb under his right suspender—he was collarless and in his shirt sleeves—drew the suspender out and let it slap against his chest. He shook his head.

"I can't get any loans at all. Tell you what, though. Your place is pretty well improved—better than most of them. I got a fellow back East on a trade. I'll give you six hundred cash for it."

Bush left hurriedly. He could not face temptation.

It was near sundown when he galloped off across the prairie, as full of despair as the night was of emptiness.

It was dusk, all but the stars which left the prairie in dim, boundless outline, as he passed the new shack, a two-room board affair.

There was a light in the window.

With a suddenness that startled his horse almost into a leap into the air, he swung back on the reins and came to a stop.

He turned his face to the house, sitting in his saddle like a statue of attention.

Through the open door came music—a clear, round, sweet voice, a marvelous voice in song.

IV

BUSH slid off his horse, threw the bridle-rein over a fence-post and slipped under a strand of barbed wire. He approached the new house in an enchanted sort of daze, walking as one in a dream and afraid to wake.

It was a clear, powerful tenor, singing in a strange tongue, and in a moment a woman's

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voice, deep and full and strong with emotion joined in.

The music ended almost in a sob. Bush dropped down on the dry grass and sat trembling as one who has looked upon a forbidden scene too wonderful for human eyes. He was fifty yards from the house.

A moment of pulsing silence—silence save for the incessant wind, dry and weird, that slithered through the dead grass of the hot night.

Then another song started, a different voice this time—a clear, liquid contralto, singing "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia."

Bush sat with hands about his knees, his eyes turned toward the wide, empty spaces, empty clear to the glittering stars in the burnished sky. It gave him a creepy sense of unreality—a voice like that on an open prairie. It was marvelously sweet, and yet somehow it seemed hardly human.

When it ended, another moment elapsed and a band began to play. Then he knew. This was a phonograph. He had never heard one, but he had read of them.

For two hours Bush sat there and listened. From where he reclined he could see no one—only a light in a window. He went no nearer, and made no sound.

The player must have been lonesome, for not until all the records had been played, and some of them the second time, did the music cease.

The light was blown out; a door shut, and then silence, save the wind scurrying along the dry prairie.

Bush put up his hand to his forehead. It was damp. He ran his fingers through his thick hair. It was wet with sweat. He rose, feeling weak, exhausted, as if coming back from a great emotional debauch.

In the saddle he put the quirt to his horse and rode bareheaded, his face against the wind, as if fleeing some mad spirit.

It was one o'clock when he got to his shack. He slept not at all, but sat in the door until daylight. Strange voices, beautiful soaring voices, overtures, bands, violins, choruses, snatches of music he had never dreamed existed, ran through his mind. If he only had his fiddle!

It was the first time in his life he had ever heard real music.

A week passed, a week of restlessness, of uncertainty, of longing. Six hundred dollars the man at Belman had offered for his place. It had cost him twenty-eight hundred, and three years of work. But six hundred would take him back—take him to the city where there was music, and lights and people.

THE next day he put his few things in the wagon, hitched up his team, and drove to Belman.

As he passed the new claim his eyes searched the place for a glimpse of its owner. A young woman was hanging a wash on a line stretched from the corner of the house to a post in the yard. The wind almost whipped the garments from her hands as she stretched them over the line, and it blew her hair loose and sent it teasing about her neck and face. But her movements, quick and sure, seemed to be laughing.

There was no one else in sight. Was she the daughter of the settler, or possibly the wife? Or could it be she was the settler?

Bush went on wondering. Anyway she was there, ready pluckily to fight the elements for the year, or years, to come. And he—he was running away.

Bush, when he arrived in town, did not go to the real-estate office first. Instead he walked down the railroad track two miles, studying over things.

About five o'clock he went to Bartlett's office.

"Well," said the real-estate man, reading the signs, "you have decided to sell?"

"Yes," nodded Bush, "next year. Look here. You offer me six hundred for my place. Let me have three hundred, and I will give you a mortgage for six hundred dollars, due in one year.

"If I fail, you get the place for half what you offer. If I don't, you get a hundred per cent. on your money."

The real-estate man agreed. He knew the first good crop would send the price of land up, and any sort of space on the face of the earth was worth a dollar and a half an acre.

Bush signed the papers, got a supply of provisions and started back before sundown. He stopped his wagon by the fence near the new shack, and listened. There was no music to-night. He waited a half-hour hoping it would start.

Then, hungry beyond endurance for the magic sounds, he got out of the wagon and went to the house. He would ask her to play.

The windows were down, the door closed.

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He knocked. There was no response. There was something white tacked to the door. He lighted a match in the cup of his hands, and held it close.

It was a note, doubtless for a passing neighbor, written in a clear, feminine hand:

Mr. Johnson: I've gone to Turnersville. Be back day after to-morrow. Put my groceries in the house and latch the door.

There was no name signed. Bush stood on the door-step looking out over the prairie. He was remembering snatches of those songs and melodies from the instrument. If he could only hear them a few times—only a few times.

He put his hand on the latch. The door was unfastened. He went in, lighted a match and looked around. The room was not like a shack inside; there was a rug, and chairs, and pictures on the wall—and a sofa with cushions.

In the corner, there it was; that must be the talking-machine. He lighted the lamp and looked at it. Only a few minutes and he saw he could work it.

He put it on his shoulder, took the box of records under his arm, blew out the light and hurried out to his wagon, almost running.

V

IT WAS midnight when Bush drove up in front of his shack.

He took the music machine in his arms and carried it into the house as carefully and tenderly as if it had been a box of priceless glass.

After he had put up the team, he lighted a lamp and studied the machine carefully. It was evidently a new one. A catalog of records and a card of instructions were with it.

In a few minutes he understood how to put on the records and change the needles and wind the spring. In the box between the first and second records were some written sheets, perhaps a letter that had not been mailed. He laid it aside. Bush was not interested in letters now. He was so hungry for the music, his hand shook as he put on the first disk.

Before he started it, he went out and walked around the shack, peering out on the prairies. There was no need—not for a month had a human being come within the range of his vision—and one's vision has a wide sweep there. But he wanted to be sure, for the sense of guilt was next strongest to his love for music. The love for melody was born with him, and the first teaching when he could understand was of honesty. Now his birthright had prevailed over his teachings—and he was a thief.

He slipped back into the shack, and hot as it was shut the door. The music was started and guilt was forgotten.

He played every record. It was two o'clock. He played them over again. This time, growing bolder, he opened the door, and putting on a record would go outside into the dark and coolness of the night and listen until it was finished.

It was four o'clock when he went to bed. His mind was tossing like a great white-and-black cloud which the wind was churning up in the heavens, now glistening white in the sun, now black and thunderous in the shadow.

A hundred instruments and voices were running through his brain. Now high, now low; again strong, and then sweet and tender like the growing of flowers or the gentle patter of rain.

Out of it all came one distinct thought—who was the owner of this marvelous machine and what was she like?

It must be a woman, and she must have wonderful taste. Not one of these records would he part with, not one did he want to change for something else.

He remembered the written sheets he had put aside in his eagerness for the music, and got up and relighted the lamp. He took them with a trembling almost equal to his first approach to the music. He would know something about her when he read it. Being a thief now overshadowed any scruples he ordinarily would have had about reading another's writings.

It was a letter, finished but not mailed. He read it once, and then again. There were things he at first did not comprehend. It opened an astonishingly new avenue to him. It had never occurred to him that music was a thing you might reason about, and talk about, and that it had a history. Before, it had just been ecstatic sound.

Then he read the letter a third time:

Thursday

DEAR BETTY:

I haven't any business starting a letter to you when I have so many things to do. But I want to tell you what a beautiful time I had all by myself

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yesterday at West Junction. I spent the whole day selecting records for my new victrola. I suppose friends of mine who go around advertising my ignorance of music will consider this another joke. I shouldn't wonder if you are anticipating a grin at my selections yourself. For I've always observed a twinkle in your eye whenever I've rendered a comment on songs and singers, so I haven't ventured much. But to-day I am going to rise and defend my personal tastes and feelings toward music—yes, I have them just like other people, only mine are all home-grown.

To begin with: I suppose I am entirely ignorant about the technique. And yet there are sounds in music that make me feel like a leaf flying before the west wind. And there are others that lead me out into the desert, where I wait in the darkness alone for distant hoof-beats. And there are silvery, trumpet-like notes that make me see rain falling through April sunlight. And then there are vast, sweeping chords that make me feel hundreds of years old—not rheumatically old, but as though I'd followed the Vikings through dark northern forests and out on the wild seas after the setting sun.

Sometimes these chords clang like the clashing of spears on shields, and I fly with the Valkyries over the fields of battle—the tumult dies away—I'm a woman seeking her slain in the silent, falling snow. The music ceases. I'm a warrior dying alone among the slain; the northern lights are playing. Well, dying in this fashion is a very satisfactory process. I escape all bad after-effects by slipping on another record and coming back to life again.

There's nothing like folk-lore music for making you see things and feel things. So yesterday I began my list with songs and dances that have grown out of the hearts of the people. (Sometimes it took the touch of a great composer to make them blossom into perfect music.) So I have mighty battle songs such as "Scots Wha Ha'e wi' Wallace Bled," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "The Marseillaise," and I have wild folk-dances like "Czardas," a Hungarian dance, and "Moladka," the Russian dance. And I have some of the beautiful, tender songs: "The Harp that Once thro' Tara's Halls," and that spirit-song, "All Through the Night." Did you ever hear anybody sing that right? I never heard but one. That was a blind man down in Kentucky. He made you feel the tide going out into the night. You'll understand what I mean when I play it for you, for my phonograph singer gets the same feeling. I was so afraid he wouldn't that I dreaded to put the record on the first time.

You see I'm very particular that my singers shall get the feeling—they can suit themselves about the high C. The fact is, I don't care a straw for a spectacular explosion on a high note. The mere fact that a grand-opera gentleman lifts the hats off the tall notes does not thrill me. This is the narrowness due to ignorance. And I'll be glad to be educated out of it—though it's a good state of mind for your pocketbook. I'm going to be honest with my phonograph and not pretend I like something I don't.

And did I tell you I'm going to have some Oriental music? My dealer hasn't any in stock, but will send for it. When I was visiting the O'Neills I found some records in their collection of South Sea Island music, wild, tribal stuff. It haunts me yet—the drums calling and cannibal feasts beating through it; yet, winding in and out among the drum-beats was the faint, restraining strains of mission hymns, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," "Rock of Ages." Could anything be more symbolical or historical than that? Why, there was an epic of the soul's struggle equal to Cædmon's tale itself.

But to return to my list proper. After my folk-music I selected some minnesinger songs, and some fine old medieval church chants.

Oh, I'd rather possess a phonograph than the magic carpet itself! By the simple process of changing the records I can be transported in the twinkling of an eye from a sod hut in Ireland to a castle on the Rhine. And finally I began with Handel—mighty creator of oratorios, and from each of the great composers made one or more selections that would best bring their individual contributions to the development of music.

I was astonished to find when I got through that I had a collection which formed a complete history of music, from the discovery of oratorio, through opera, songs without words, down to the present—a shining path of song over the singing mountains! Now don't you think this sort of a collection is more interesting than a selection of great soloists alone?

Of course, I had to have some of the beautiful voices that make you see things. So Schumann-Heink sings "Stille Nacht" for me; and Scotti and Farrar set me dreaming with their "Night of Love." And I have a number of other celestial voices. Oh, I'm as thrifty as Harry Lauder himself till it comes to violin music. Then I lose my head and my last cent together. But being H. L.'s own countrywoman I took care yesterday not to hear any violin music till my list was nearly filled out. Oh, the shining soul, half poet, half woman, that lives in a violin! When I hear its winged voice I forget whether I am Christian or Pagan, Jew or Gentile—I only know that I have found my God.

Well, I see I've bought more violin music than I had room for on my list. But I think you'll enjoy it.

But I haven't told you a thing about my ranch. That is just like me—get so absorbed in one thing, I forget everything else. You can hardly know, though, being out here on the prairie all alone, what the music means to me. And now that I have it, what fun and comfort I'll take with it—even if I do have to skimp on supplies next Winter to pay the piper.

Come and see me. It is only seven hundred and eighty-three miles and a fraction.

HELEN.

Bush went back to bed. Daylight came in a little while, and he had not slept.

He got up and lighted the little oil-stove, but forgot to put on his coffee. He sat in the doorway with the letter as the sun came up.

No one he had ever known or imagined could have written that letter. The girls in the Huckleberry Hills did not write anything in letters except about the dance next Thursday night, or something "you said," or "he said," or "she said." Sometimes they worked in a verse of doggerel—"If you love me as I love you, no knife can cut our love in two."

This letter—why, that girl must be a

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wonderful person. How much she knew! It was mystery, most of it, to him. Only, she loved music and most of all the violin, and she was to be very lonesome without her phonograph.

His sense of guilt deepened with the daylight. There was a personal element in it now. It may be the same crime to steal from a warehouse as from the hands of a hungry child, but it does not feel like it.

He remembered she spoke of being a countrywoman of Harry Lauder's. He looked in the music catalog. She was Scotch. And she had come from eight hundred miles away. That was not very far east of his own hills. She was alone. She must be plucky, and she was cheery in the letter. But she would be lonesome without her music.

Four days later, after sundown, he hitched the team to the wagon. Then he went in, played each record twice.

He carefully put the phonograph and box of records on a bed of straw, and drove off across the prairie.

The moon was still up when he reached the new house, and threw a slanting, glistening light over the dry sweep of the wide spaces. The girl would be asleep, though, as it was nearly one o'clock.

He took the talking-machine in his arms and slipped cautiously up to the house. He planned to leave it out in front. But something white on the door caught his eye.

He tiptoed up, and lighted a match. The notice read:

Am not at home. Leave the phonograph in the house. Any time you are passing stop and play it as long as you wish. The door is never locked. But please don't borrow it any more. I get too lonesome without it.

She had expected him to return it.

He left the phonograph just where he found it, and the box of records, and the letter.

He tore a corner from a newspaper on the lamp-stand, and wrote:

I stole it, but I couldn't keep it. It's been the best four days I ever had, and the worst. Much obliged. Good-by. THIEF.

VI

BUSH was again plowing for his fourth crop of wheat. The seed took two hundred of his three hundred dollars. The remainder was a meager allowance for the year. It meant much figuring and little eating. Nothing but the carefulest economy would get him through to harvest time, for he had much of his feed to buy.

For a month he had not been to town. He felt guilty and was afraid to go—afraid the girl in the new house by the road would recognize him as the thief. It was a foolish fear, of course. He knew other settlers passed her place, and people from town rode by there. She would have no way of knowing it was he. And yet he dreaded to pass.

But by and by he had to go. He could not stay away longer. He remembered that music as a thirsty man in an alkali country remembers the cool, sweet springs of his native hills.

He did not turn his head as he rode by, merely his eyes. He must not appear to be looking. There was no one in sight; but on the door was a white sign, large enough to be seen from the road.

He struck his horse into a gallop, his heart rioting with anticipation. He ran his horse, as if that would hasten the coming of night. She was away, and had purposely made the notice large so he would know.

At the store he had intended to buy nothing. But a can of pears tempted him beyond endurance. He had been living on beans and salt meat.

It was scarcely dark when he returned to her place. He approached cautiously, then knocked to be sure she was still away. He lighted a match and read the notice tacked to the door:

"There are some new records. Go in and help yourself."

He lighted the lamp and drew the easiest chair beside the open door where he could get the breeze and look out at the stars as he listened.

The first record in the box was "Scots Wha Ha'e wi' Wallace Bled." The stirring fight in it made every nerve and muscle tingle. He was glad he had not quit and run away.

He played all the way through, laying the records aside as he played them. When he lifted the last record, at the very bottom was a folded note addressed to "The Thief of Music."

He went back to the chair and sat with it held unopened in his hand for some time. The strange, unexplored fields of emotion

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over which he had been, "the shining mountains of music" as she had called them, all seemed to come to focus on this note. What had she said, and why had she said anything? The note ran:

You poor boy! How lonesome you must be! You are not a thief, of course. Music is free. It belongs to all who love it. Because I happen to own the machine that sets some of it free does not give me the right to be a horrid monopolist. Whenever you see the notice on the door, I am away. Come in and play as long as you like.

P. S. Which record do you like best?

Bush found a stub of a pencil in the hip pocket of his overalls, sat down by the lamp, put his left elbow on the table and began to gather handfuls of his thick hair into the fingers of his left hand. He wanted to say something worthy of his emotion, but he had never expressed himself on paper before. And when a young man tries to express himself in writing for the first time to a young woman, it is like an amateur golf-player trying to "put" before spectators.

"I like the violin one, the 'Serenade,' best, I think. But I like them all," he wrote, and then studied it over a moment. "When I hear them, I feel like I wasn't on the prairie." Again he waited, but none of his other emotions would accommodate themselves to paper. He added, "I'm much obliged."

On top of the note he set his precious can of pears, and went out into the night, feeling some of the music he had heard.

For the next few weeks the spirit of unrest and loneliness was upon Bush as it had never been before. He worked sixteen hours a day—plowed and drilled until he was so tired he could scarcely stay up long enough at night to get a bite of supper. The wheat was sown before he went again to town.

This time as he passed, the girl was at home. With hammer and nails and boards from boxes she was building a pen for chickens. While her face was turned from the road he watched her work. He had never seen a girl like that anywhere. There was something so fine about her—something that made one think of music and flowers—and yet how plucky and competent she must be! And all the time her movements seemed to be jesting at her work, seemed to be laughing at the makeshifts. The sun was on her hair.

She straightened up and pushed the loose hair back from her face. But as she looked toward the road Bush's eyes were straight ahead, and he was riding very unconcernedly toward town.

Early in November he went again to Belman. But again she was at home. There was smoke from the stovepipe.

In the weeks that followed, Bush scarcely knew whether it was the music or the girl of whom he was thinking, the thoughts were so much alike. She was the music, and the music was she. The songs, the orchestras, the crashing of symphonies, the loving, weeping violins, the soft melodies—all were but expressions of her mood.

In December he went by once more. Again there was smoke from the stovepipe that stuck up through the roof of the little house.

Scared as he would have been to meet without invitation or introduction a girl from the world of which he dreamed, yet he would have gone to the house on some pretext had he not still felt himself a thief. She would know him, and however kind she had been, it was only from pity. Nobody could forgive a thief. They never did in the Huckleberry Hills. Sometimes they hanged them.

EARLY in December a blizzard came—the first of the Winter. But it covered the earth with a blessed blanket of snow, under which his precious wheat was snug and safe. The wheat this Fall had grown fine and rank, as it did that first Fall. This snow meant not only protection from the freezes and Winter winds, but more moisture.

As soon as the storm abated he rode in to the music girl's place. This snow gave one a perfect excuse for inquiring how a neighbor fared. He would not mention the phonograph, and there would be no reason why she should suspicion him of being the thief.

The snow was banked up around her door. There was no smoke. He went in. She had evidently taken refuge in town.

It was gone! The music-machine was gone. And most of her other things were gone—only the table and two chairs and the stove were left.

She had given it up and gone back.

He sat down on a cold chair and clutched his arms shiveringly about himself. Outside

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the north wind howled like a legion of lost and frozen spirits. Outside the prairie was white and bare and cold for millions and millions of miles. It was the loneliest spot in a lonely, lonely world.

He got up stiffly and found an ax inside the kitchen. Lest she might return, he split the kindling and dug some wood out of the snow and piled it beside the stove.

He did not go on to town, but turned back to his own shack.

The rest of that Winter was a gap of time that always made memory ache. He dared not think of warmth and light even as it was in the cabins of Huckleberry Hills —much less of the music and laughter and lighted ways of the great world toward which he had faced. In discomfort and cold, in hunger for food, in heart sickness inexpressible he hung on day by day, until at last it was Spring.

Spring on the prairie is not so bad. If there has been snow or early rains, the tender young grass covers the whole earth, and flowers bloom among the greenness.

And there had been plenty of snow, and an early Spring rain. The wheat looked as it had never looked before; there seemed to be a vitality, a firmness, a determination in the very blades of it, that lighted once more the old hopes in Bush. Suppose his luck really was coming—suppose at last his faith was to be rewarded. But he did not dare let himself think of it. If he failed this time, he would go away without a dollar.

One morning, the last of April he rode into town. As he passed her place he looked as he always did toward her desolate, forsaken little house.

And this time his heart jumped, and ran, and pounded as if it would get away from him.

She had come back and was making garden!

VII

ALL the way to town there seemed to run through the good Spring sunlight upon the green prairies a melody as subtly sweet as the barcarole; and the motif of it was, "She is back—she is back."

Bush returned before sundown. At the rattle of his wagon she came to the door of her little house, sleeves to the elbow, wearing an all-over white apron. For a moment she stood and watched him pass. He did not turn his head toward the house, but his eyes were upon her, and he felt a pulling impulse to wave. But he still called himself a thief, and drove on.

From the tenth of April there had been no frost. On the twenty-seventh there was a good rain. The Spring had come early and warm.

It was Sunday, and Bush walked out through his wheat-field. Never had he seen a better stand. Already it had bunched until he could scarcely see the ground. And after the rain how it grew! The green blades seemed fairly striving to rush up and up. The latent strength of the prairie soil, unused through many dry years, was crowding into every root and pushing up every stalk. The fifth of May it was half-way to his knees. The tenth it was knee-high and beginning to "boot."

That day Bush looked it over. He walked from end to end of the field—two hundred acres, a dark-green sea of hope, a sea that laughed in the warm, fragrant prairie winds.

The hope was too strong to dwell upon, the prospect too good to trust. It was like this once before, the first year he came. And then the hot winds and the drought!

If only it would rain—just once more! Why, this would make twenty, twenty-five —perhaps thirty bushels to the acre. That meant. . . .

The fields swam before him in the dizziness of his hope. He could go then without running away from a failure. He could go without being a quitter. He would have money to buy wheat land where rain was sure, and some over, maybe, for one month—just a month in the world of which he had dreamed from boyhood.

His blood surged up in a tumult of longing for his humankind once more, for laughter, and music—and a lot of rest. He had worked more than three years, worked in a way that would have broken those industrious scoffers of Huckleberry Hills who prophesied his laziness would bring him to the poorhouse.

The days that followed were on such a tension that Bush ate only when his hunger cried loud enough to drown the other thoughts that clamored and marched and sang—and prayed through his head and heart.

If it only rained once more!

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The twentieth day of May he could endure the anxiety of watching no longer without a break. He went to town. He hoped this time she would not be at home, so he could stop in and hear the music again. But she was, and busy in her garden.

All things were growing this Spring. Bush heard that even Finley, the tobacco-borrower and food-sponge, who had managed to hold on some way to his squatter claim, had a fair crop.

Bush waited until after dark to pass her house on the return. He hoped—yes, she was.

A half mile away he caught the first notes, the high, clear tenor he had heard that first night. It was Caruso singing "Céleste Aïda."

Bush rode by slowly so as to make no noise. He hitched his horse to the barbed-wire fence, crawled under, and once more slipped near the house, within fifty yards.

The full moon hung high over the prairie, like a great silver disk only a few miles away. The grass was soft and the earth warm. Bush stretched out on his back. He was hidden from view thus.

For two hours he watched the stars and the moon, and visioned in the night sky the music he heard—the marching, the clash of arms, the dances, the death-songs, the wooer at the lattice, and the song of love over moonlit waters.

She seemed restless tonight. She seemed lonesome. "All Through The Night" and "I Hear You Calling Me" and others that had a heart cry in them she played over and over.

The music stopped and the light went out. He arose cautiously from the grass and slipped back to his horse. As he mounted he looked back at the house, and he fancied something white moved in the door. His heart beat fearfully. She had seen him.

THE first of June and no rain. The prairie was dry now. The wheat was not hurt yet. The soil when you kicked it up was dusty. The wheat was heading. The blades looked a little dusty and droopy.

Once more Bush went through the field. It took an effort. The dread of the next few days almost choked him. The wheat was rank and tall. It came to his armpits. The heads were large. He counted the meshes on many of them. There were fifty, seventy, or eighty grains of wheat. What a crop it would be if it only rained!

For three days Bush did little but sit in the doorway and watch the sky, or walk back and forth across the prairie. He went no more into the wheat-field. The blades were drooping a little now. The wheat was on the very verge of life or death. He could not bear to watch it.

The fifth of June he stood at night before the door of his shack. The moon was straight overhead. The sky was so clear and dry it looked burnished. The wind was stronger than usual—right off the deserts of the southwest. And there was a hint of blighting hotness in it.

Bush felt a wild, childish longing to reach up and grapple with the elements; to wrench the wind around into another direction; to snatch at the dry, burning sky and fight with it. Why did it burn up and burn up all a man's toil, and his life-blood?

Well, another day or two and it would all be over. Even that would be better than this tension, which could not be endured much longer.

He went in and tried to sleep. But it was hot as July, and he tossed restlessly on his hard cot. But about one o'clock a coolness sprang up, and he dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke, he sat up in bed with a jerk and rubbed his eyes and listened. It could not be—he was dreaming. It was not possible. Yes, it was—it was raining!

He dropped his head forward on the bed and cried for the first time in ten years.

How beautiful the prairie! The grass was still green over all the wild land. And the wheat—Bush's was misty with bloom. It rose and fell in long rhythmic billows that filled him with a great pæan of joyousness.

It was assured now. Nothing could happen to it, and it would be the biggest crop in the history of the country.

Two weeks until harvest. Even at a low estimate Bush knew he would have thirty bushels to the acre—six thousand bushels. His waiting had been justified.

He took his wagon and went to Belman for harvest supplies. He would have everything ready. His money was gone, but credit was unlimited now. He bought a binder, and left with the harvesting committee of the town his order for hands.

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They were to bring from the East the help demanded by the farmers.

Bush loaded his wagon with binder twine and other harvest supplies and started home about seven o'clock.

It was dusk as he came to the girl's house. He had listened, but heard no music. As he came opposite the house he saw a white sign on the door.

She was away!

He jumped out of the wagon, hitched his horses to the fence and made for the house almost in a run.

He was happy tonight, exultant. He put on a Hungarian dance first, and then the Mikado—and a Virginia reel. At the reel he got up and danced around the room.

He felt tonight like the troubadour of the Huckleberry Hills.

He had played for an hour or more. He was too happy to mind time. He heard a wagon passing and closed the door, and went on playing. It was near eleven o'clock when he finally left. Under the case of the phonograph he had slipped a note:

When my wheat is sold, I'm going to buy you ten new records. I wish you would pick out what you'd rather have, and leave it here. I'll find it. B.

He did not sign himself thief this time. He felt as if all these four years had somehow justified themselves.

As he drove on he was singing for the first time in all these months. It was not the wild yodel of the Huckleberry Hills, but snatches of the songs he had just been hearing.

There was no moon tonight. But the stars lighted the trail so it was easy to follow.

"I wonder—" Bush fixed his eye on the handle of the Big Dipper—"if she's ever lonesome, too." And then directly, "I wonder—if she'd be offended if I'd come see her some Sunday."

There were galloping horses on the trail back of him. Bush looked around. A party of young roisterers from town, perhaps. They were running their horses at top speed.

There were five—six of them.

They divided and went on both sides of the wagon. Two of them swung around in front of his team.

"Halt!" they called.

Bush drew up in amazement. Part of them dismounted. Lanterns flashed. And a man at the back of his wagon said in vindictive anger:

"Nab him, boys. He's the thief, all right."

VIII

THEY took Bush Denny back to Belman and put him in jail. All the way Bush was so wrathful over their blunder he wanted to fight the whole bunch. But they were as wrathful as he, and there were six of them.

The law may presume a man is innocent until he is proved guilty, but a deputy sheriff does not. The posse did not suspicion that Bush was guilty—they took it for granted. They had, in fact, found part of the stolen goods in his wagon.

When the door closed on him and he was left alone in a cell of the Belman jail Bush began to figure out the import of it. At first it seemed preposterous that one so innocent should even be suspicioned. But the more he thought of it, the less he could find with which to prove himself innocent.

Yet surely they could not get evidence enough to convict him. Surely he could at least overthrow any circumstantial evidence against him; so a jury would turn him loose.

And then the full danger struck him. He dropped on the prison cot sweating with fear. If at the preliminary hearing there was even some evidence against him, he would be bound over to await the action of the district court. And he could not give bail.

Good heavens! That meant three months in jail, and his wheat crop almost ready to harvest.

The preliminary was held before the justice of the peace at two o'clock next day.

Bush asked for a lawyer and got the only one in town—a chinless, spineless by-product of some over-bountiful law school which had been shed upon this lawyerless village. He was almost as useful in a real case as a jack-rabbit in a blizzard.

The prosecuting attorney came down from the county-seat. He was a man with a past, a man with ability and acidity, who had come to western Kansas in an effort to dry out a tormenting thirst. He was very bitter toward thieves. He did not like competition.

The charge was burglarizing Johnson Brockett's general store. The back door

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had been pried open and about a hundred dollars' worth of goods and provisions stolen.

Johnson swore that he locked up the store and went home at nine o'clock. An hour later, after he had retired, there was a knocking at his door. It was the Burdick boy, who in passing through the alley had seen a man carry a load of stuff out of the back door of the store and put it in a wagon.

The storekeeper had given the alarm, and the posse was out in pursuit in twenty minutes.

The Burdick boy swore that he saw the man taking something that looked like a cheese on his shoulder, and run with it to his wagon in the alley. The man then jumped in the wagon and drove off northwest. The boy had hurried to give the alarm.

"Would you recognize the man?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

"I don't know," answered the boy.

"Does that look like him?" He pointed an accusing finger at Bush.

"Yes, I think so," replied the Burdick boy.

He admitted on cross-examination it was too dark to see. But insisted Bush was about the height and size of the burglar.

Then the deputy sheriff and the members of his posse testified: they had chased the thief, following the fresh signs of his wagon tracks to a mile beyond where that girl homesteader lived—the Wolcott girl. They had caught the accused, and found various items of the stolen goods in the back of his wagon. One item was a cheese. All of the goods were identified by the storekeeper.

During this evidence Bush had sat in a stupor of horror. He felt the driving, bitter prosecuting attorney fastening the toils around him, and he had no power to resist. He could not even cry out in angry denial.

It was no longer a matter of inconvenience, of delay—it looked like the penitentiary. And his wheat, that two hundred acres of beautiful wheat, the hopes of four years, the consummation of all he had toiled and suffered for, would ripen, and fall—wasted, lost! Bartlett would close the mortgage; and when he came out of jail in the Fall, even if the court did not convict him, he would be broken and branded.

The prosecution had finished, and it looked like an unshakable case. Bush told his own story, but the accused's story has little weight. The old justice listened respectfully, and even a little regretfully. But Bush knew beyond a hope what his verdict would be: "Bound over to await trial in the criminal court."

As Bush left the chair used for the witnesses a new spectator entered. A young woman had slipped in through the open door.

It was the music girl. She was a little flushed, as if from hurry, but her eyes were bright and her lips shut determinedly.

In the brief pause after Bush left the witness chair the girl spoke up from near the door, in a firm, self-possessed tone:

"Mr. Murfee," she addressed the justice of the peace, "may I ask at what time this burglary was supposed to have occurred?"

"Between nine and ten o'clock, Miss Wolcott." A justice case is informal.

"Then Mr. Denny is not guilty. He was at my home from nine to ten o'clock."

Everybody had turned to look. The girl's face was flushed scarlet now; but her eyes were still steady and her lips shut firmly.

"Miss Wolcott," said the justice, "do you wish to appear as a witness for the accused?"

"I do."

"Then come up and be sworn."

At this Bush's little chinless attorney picked up new hope, and the prosecutor bristled.

"Tell your story," nodded the justice.

"There is no story to tell," said the girl. She was a beautiful girl, and the flush of embarrassment only added to her beauty. "Mr. Bush Denny was at my house from nine to half-past ten last night."

"You say Mr. Denny was visiting you?" asked the little attorney. His examination always managed to bring out things he did not want to bring out.

"No."

"Well," nonplused, "he was there?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Sure."

"There is no doubt about it?"

"None."

Instead of quitting on certainty the attorney attempted to double up evidence.

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"You talked to him?"

"No."

"You spoke to him?"

"No."

The little lawyer rubbed his incipient chin.

"But he was there?"

"Yes," she replied.

The lawyer looked around, sort of bewildered, to the prosecution. "That is all."

"See here," the prosecutor began belligerently, "what is back of this? If the accused was at your house from nine to half-past ten, and you did not so much as speak to him, what was the matter?"

"I was not at the house at the same time," she confessed.

"Oh, ho!" nodded the prosecutor. "You merely saw him come and go?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"And it was dark?"

"Yes."

"And you were not close enough to see his face?"

"No."

"Then," thundered the prosecutor, "how do you know it was he? You do not mean that you could recognize this man at a distance of fifty or a hundred yards in the dark?"

"No."

And as the prosecutor turned to the justice, with a sneer on his face, Bush's hopes, that had flamed up as the girl took the stand, now spluttered and went out as when the wick of a lamp is quickly turned down.

"Your honor," said the prosecutor, "that is all. You see this witness's testimony is absolutely worthless."

IX

HELEN WOLCOTT sat uncertain and puzzled for a moment, looking from Bush's attorney, who swallowed, without saying anything, to the justice. She was not through, but she hardly knew how to go ahead.

"Mr. Murfee," she said in a tone of appeal, "let me explain. Mr. Denny, you know, lives beyond my ranch. We are not really acquainted. We have never spoken to each other. He is very fond of music, and I have a phonograph. When I am away I always leave a notice on the door for him to go in and play.

"He has passed several times lately, and I was at home each time, so he did not get to hear the music.

"He passed yesterday going to town, and I knew he was lonesome for the music, so I put the sign on the door, and when I heard his wagon returning I left the house and sat out on the grass beyond the garden.

"It was nine o'clock as I left the house. He came in not five minutes later, and it was half-past ten when he left.

"Although it was dark, I knew him by his appearance and walk. Anyway, no one else would have come in and played my phonograph."

The justice nodded. He was almost convinced; most of the listeners in the court-room were.

But the prosecutor was shaking his head vigorously.

"How do you account for the stolen articles in his wagon?" he asked the girl triumphantly.

"Were there stolen articles in his wagon?"

"There were."

She thought for the fraction of a moment.

"The real thief must have put them there. Oh, I remember now." Her eyes shone with relief. "A man in a wagon drove by while he was playing and stopped a few minutes. I thought at the time he was only listening to the music. But he was the thief and put the things in Mr. Denny's wagon."

Instantly Bush started forward. He had thought of Finley, but he settled back.

"Your story may be plausible." The prosecutor still shook his head. "But it is not evidence. You have not established an alibi for the accused, because you have not positively proved that he is the man who was at your home from nine to ten-thirty."

"There is a way you can tell for sure," she said.

"How is that?" asked the justice, really curious.

"I brought some of the records he handled last night. There was dust on them, and he left thumb-marks on the backs of them."

The old justice was interested at once. He knew nothing of Bertillon, but he knew his Mark Twain—and "Pudd'n'-Head Wilson." They raked up a magnifying-glass and had Bush make thumb-prints beside those already on the record.

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The old justice studied them a moment, nodded, and turned to the girl.

"You are right—prisoner is discharged."

IT was dark before Bush left town. He had hunted for two hours after the trial before he found what he wanted.

He whipped his team into a gallop, hoping he would not be too late. If only the door was open—or she was in the yard—or the lamp burning.

He saw something white, and his heart beat gladly. She was in the door. He hitched his team and went under the fence. There was a timid haste about his walk as he went toward the house.

Twenty yards away he asked with a laugh in his tone, the laugh of the troubadour:

"Do you know me this far?"

"Yes," and she laughed in reply.

He carried something under his arm. Without another word he sat down on the door-step, near her feet—she did not move them—and lifted a violin to his shoulder

It was Shubert's "Serenade" he played first—played wonderfully well, from memory. And then he played, as he sometimes had in the Huckleberry Hills, without plan or thought or purpose.

Only now it was of the prairie of which his violin sang, the open spaces, the grass, the wheat, the winds and stars, and she—she was in it.

All the restless longing of Huckleberry Hills, all the bitter loneliness and unconquered fight of the four years on the dry prairie, broke out into the cry of the strings. And then it changed.

He could not have put in words, of course, what was in his heart. Life had not made him thus articulate. All he knew was, something caught him up in a mood formless as the open spaces about him. Only the fervent, undefined longing in him—and the violin knew.

It was not of the waiting and working, of the drought and suspense, of fear and hope; not the horror of prison, the Winter's loneliness, nor of the burning Summer desolation that he played.

All that was past. The fight had been won. Victory had come at last. He would be rich in a month as Huckleberry Hills counted riches. He had been almost miraculously freed in the hour of certain conviction. There must have been, there was, a great underswell of glory and thanksgiving running through his heart, but it was silent and wide like the prairie. And it was not of that he played.

It was a new, wonderful vision that gave meaning to all the rest—a trembling hope upon which his soul was centered, the answer to all his years of restless seeking; in it were the lights and the music and life he had sought. It was light and music—and life.

He finished and his arm dropped to his side. He had made his plea. No words could add or explain. He sat and waited.

The June wind ran among the prairie-grass. The night brooded over the fields. The stars waited. The world stood still. His breath was prisoned in his lungs, not a muscle moved. Life stopped while he waited for a word or sign from her. A moment went by—and another and another.

There were tears in her eyes. She leaned forward and put her hand with infinite tenderness on his thick, unruly hair.

"Poor boy—how you have suffered!"

He caught her hand and pressed it against his cheek, and kissed it, and held it, and pressed it to his face again.

She drew a deep, deep breath and let it out in a long, happy sigh. She spoke softly.

"The thief has stolen something else than my music."

"Yes," he replied exultantly, and turned his face to her. "But he's willing to serve fifty years for it."

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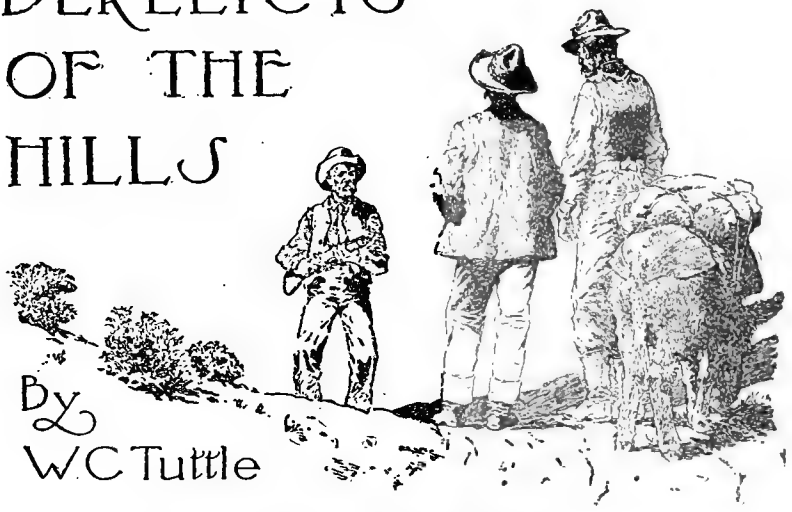
DERELICTS OF THE HILLS



By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Magpie's Nightbear"

NOW, I reckon yuh had to come clear up here to tell me that th' grub is on th' table, eh? Of all th' gol dinged——"

The grumbler turned from his inspection of the three split fuses in the gopher hole and cast a baleful glance in my direction. He spat against the side of the cut and smiled after looking me over from new sombrero to riding boots.

"Ex—cuse me, stranger," he grunted, climbing out of the hole and wiping the clay off his hands on his weather-beaten overalls. "I shore thought yuh was Magpie. Yuh see we ain't used to havin' strangers hereabouts. Magpie's my pardner and he's supposed to be down at th' cabin gittin' dinner."

"I saw a man sitting on a log down the trail a ways as I rode up," I remarked. "Seemed like a curious kind of a person. Wouldn't talk at all. Just sat there and gazed off across the hills."

" 'Bout six feet long and ten inches wide —sort of uh roan with sparsely settled whiskers?" asked the prospector.

"Exactly," I agreed. "I noticed particularly the moth-eaten hirsute gathering and also the immense distance from the lobe of his right ear to his rear suspender buttons."

"Haw, haw!" exploded the prospector. "Suspender buttons! Haw, haw! Dog-gone good thing yuh didn't mention suspender buttons to him, 'cause he's sort a sensitive over such trifles. Uh-huh," he grunted reflectively, "that was Magpie Simpkins, shore was. Did yuh say he didn't seem to be lookin' at anything particular—jist sorta lookin'?"

I assured him that as far as I was able to discern there was nothing about those mesquite-covered hills to cause a man to focus on one certain spot for an indefinite period of time, oblivious to all material matters.

"There's one or two words in th' American langwidge I ain't never been introduced to," he replied, "and jist now yuh used 'em all in uh heap, but I gits th' drift. Magpie's trancin'."

"He's what?" I asked.

"Trancin'," he repeated, with a wide smile. "Anyway, I reckon that's what it's called. Yuh see, this pardner uh mine yuh gazes on down there has got th' idea he can commune with th' speerits, and I reckon he's down there tryin' to raise uh ghost."

"Go ahead and laugh," he continued, when I smiled. "Mebby it sounds funny to you, but, dog-gone it, you ain't never been partners to uh scientific loco human or yuh would jist shed uh tear and wish me well. Jist lemme tell yuh something now. I been— Say, I plumb forgot to ask yuh if yuh was lookin' fer some one up here, stranger. My name is Harper—christened when I was young and plumb helpless with th' appellation of Wellington Alexander, which same ain't no title fer uh sourdough. Th' first pardner I had rubbed it all out and called me Ike."

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"My name is Frederick Norwood," I replied, and smiled with Harper. "My family are of the old English stock, and believed in saddling a child with all the names in the family record, and as names were dirt cheap at the time of my christening they never stopped at one little old middle name."

"Jist lookin' over th' mineral wealth of this great and glorious country, eh?" reflected Harper, as if I had made that statement but corrected his presumption by adding, "That's all there is to ever bring uh feller north uh Piperock."

"I'm looking for a fellow by the name of Woods," I stated.

"Tellurium Woods?" asked Harper.

"I believe that is what he's called. I stopped at the Empire Hotel at Piperock and the proprietor, a Mr. Jones, directed me up here. It's a queer thing, but the description he gave me seems to cover the man I saw down the trail — your partner, Mr. Simpkins."

"Uh-ha," he agreed. "I reckon it would. Yuh see, this Cobalt Jones thinks he's funny. He expected yuh to spring it on Magpie. Mebby you'd have got past with it, bein' as Magpie's in uh trance, but I'd shore hate to try it. Yes, sir, I reckon it would have laid the ghost."

"Would you mind explaining?" I asked. "I come up here to look over a copper prospect for some Eastern parties—property belonging to one Tellurium Woods, whose description fully covers the party you assure me is Magpie Simpkins, an embryro spiritualist. Also, that he's sensitive to suspender buttons."

"Mister Norwood," said Harper, biting off a fresh chew, "I sent Magpie down to th' cabin to cook uh pot uh beans about two hours ago, and knowin' th' animile as I do I'll bet uh dobie dollar that he'll start that fire in about two hours more. Also, bein' as I ain't in no hurry to shoot them three measly blasts, which won't uncover nothin' but shovel work, I'll tell yuh what and whyfore.

Yore time ain't worth no more than mine, I figure cause yuh won't find Tellurium Woods in this country no ways, so lets me and you mosey over under that big mesquite and I'll wau-wau yuh th' hull thing."

We reached the comfortable spot indicated, and he began:

UH COURSE Magpie ain't his right name. He got that name 'cause one time he gits lost in th' Bitter Roots and near starves to death. Shot all his ca'tridges away tryin' to kill uh magpie—th' same bein' classed with coyotes and buzzards as eatables—in uh country where blue grouse is thicker than fleas on uh pet coon.

I been pardners with Magpie fer ten years now and I knows that jasper jist like I knows astronomy. Th' milk uh human kindness jist plumb bogs him down at times, and as a pardner he assays big; but when it comes to doin' useful things he don't show uh trace.

First he tries hypnotism. Tried it on uh wildcat in uh spruce-tree, but somehow th' cat didn't sabe th' play. If yuh ask him he'll show yuh where he was boloed down in th' Philippines. That was ten year ago that I met him in th' hospital in Helena and we went to Nome together.

Man, that human string-bean has dabbled in all kinds of scientific stuff. He took up Christian Science and played her four ways from th' jack, but one time he gits an ulcerated tooth and shifts his affections to psychology.

That shore was an affliction. He suffered from that fer uh year. Psychology goes bust when he salts uh feller's mine with copper to make said miner work harder, and some sucker come along and buys th' mine on th' strength of th' "salt" fer five thousand—said mine-owner bein' that same Tellurium Woods yuh pilgrims up here to see. I know this is stringin' th' what and whyfore out pretty long, but I wants yuh to git an idea of this pardner uh mine.

I'm sittin' in front of our cabin uh couple uh months ago and watchin' th' sun set behind th' Medicine Men peaks and keepin' one eye on th' trail. Magpie's been down to Piperock fer seven days—which same trip after grub don't take more than two days. I'm down to greasin' th' fry-pan with uh ragged bacon rind, and th' coffee has been boiled so darn much it tastes like stewed gunnysack. In other words there ain't enough grub in th' shack to feed uh hummin'-bird's offspring.

Long about that time I hears uh jackass brayin' down th' trail and 'long comes Magpie and them three pack-jacks and all four uh them animiles is singin'. Th' jacks is singin' 'cause they knows th' packs is soon

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to come off, but I ain't hep to what makes Magpie so care-free—him usually bein' too deep in thought to sing above a whisper.

"Top uh th' evenin' to yuh!" yells Magpie, as they gits in range of th' wickiup.

I jist grumbles somethin' about starvin' to death and workin' my fool head off while others take singin' lessons, but Magpie jist sighs deep and helps take th' packs off. I don't see no new books in th' packs, and I'm uh heap relieved.

"Feels sort a lonesome like up here," states Magpie, while I'm busy linin' my spare-ribs with good bacon and beans.

"Uh - ha," I agrees between mouthfuls, "especially after sojournin' in th' city fer quite uh spell." Piperock bein' all of uh hundred souls, six Chinks and uh small Greaser settlement.

"Ike," sez he, after uh long spell uh silence, "did yuh ever think what uh lot uh life we miss livin' thisaway?"

I'm too busy eatin', so he continues!

"Sort a shut off from th' society uh wimmen, and all that. Th' more I think about it th' more it appals me. No place to go, nothin' to do. Dog-gone it, Ike, we're jist uh pair uh deerylicks on th' hills uh life, you and me. Jist driftin' and driftin'——"

"Well, gol dang it, Magpie," sez I, "that's th' only reasonable way fer uh poor man to git depth. Uh course if yuh think we'll hit it any sooner by sinkin' uh shaft, why ——"

"Ike Harper," states Magpie, sort uh lofty like, "yuh got uh soul like uh packburrow. All yuh knows is to eat and work. Yore thoughts don't soar higher than th' top of th' table. I'm sorry fer yuh, Ike, 'cause uh feller uh yore plebian tastes can't appreciate life. This life we're follerin' leads but to an unmarked grave. Don't yuh ever git th' soul hunger a-tall, Ike?"

"Mebby not soul hunger," I replies, "but I've been out of beans and bacon fer two days now."

Magpie plumb ignores this last, and ruminates deep.

"Ike," sez he after while, "there ain't much use askin', but did yuh ever figger any on th' wimmen question?"

I replies sort a offhand-like that I oncet knowed uh squaw down Yuma way, but I never finished th' romantic discourse 'cause Magpie looks me over with th' same look in his eyes that he had jist before I starts wearin' fresh meat on my right eye once.

"Mr. Harper, I asked yuh that question thinkin' that perhaps yuh had uh tiny spark uh mentality on top of yore neck, but I finds that I'm all wrong. I grieves for yuh, Ike."

I swallers my chew tryin' to make uh snigger sound like uh yawn, but Magpie don't notice and keeps on ramblin' in th' same vein.

"Ike, didn't yuh ever think about comin' home at night and find uh pretty wife waitin' supper for yuh. One with eyes th' color of th' deep places in Sawtooth Lake and hair like th' sunset on th' Medicine peaks. Some one to love yuh, Ike, and clean up th' cabin and make yuh quit wearin' nails to connect yore suspenders to yore pants."

Magpie sighs clear down to th' bottoms of his boots and fumbles fer th' makin's after deliverin' this oration.

I takes uh fresh chew and asks friendly-like—

"When did she come to Piperock, Magpie?"

"Week ago last—say, who yuh talkin' about?"

"That new blue-eyed, yaller-haired waitress at Cobalt Jones' hashery."

"Yuh danged old sourdough sleuth!" yells Magpie, but seems tickled uh heap to think I done guessed it. "How did yuh ever figger it out, Ike?"

"Magpie," sez I, sort uh patronizin'ly like, "I may be of uh low order of intelligence and never suffer none from th' soul hunger, but by golly, I'm kumtux on this here love stuff. Th' little jasper with his bow and arrer shore beat yuh on th' draw, old-timer."

Magpie don't deny it none. Jist set there and grins and rubs his hands over his boots like they hurt his feet.

"Bein' as there ain't much to do around here," he opines after while, "I reckon I'd sort a like to go down to Piperock in th' mornin'. Yuh can make out uh list uh what yuh wants and——"

"Say, what's th' idea?" I cuts in. "Yuh jist gits in with enough to last uh month or more."

Magpie gits up sorta weary like and as he shuffles into th' cabin he makes th' following statement:

"I reckon that's right, pardner, but I gotta go back right away. Yuh see I'm goin' to marry her, and I plumb forgot to ask her—sorta forgot it, I reckon."

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TH' NEXT mornin' Ike lights out down th' trail with th' rest of th' pack-jacks and I don't see him for four days. When he comes driftin' in about sundown on th' fourth day he's smilin' all over his face as he comes up th' trail to th' cabin. He shakes my hand sorta excited-like and tells me I'm lookin' skookum.

"Ike," sez he, "I went and done it."

"Got married?" I asks.

"Not yet, but soon. I'm goin' to enter th' solemn and holy bonds uh matrimony and wedlock next Tuesday."

"Uh course," sez I, "not havin' been uh pardner uh yours fer more than ten years and not havin' saved yore worthless life more than once uh year, it would be presumptious I suppose to inquire what name this unsuspectin' female person answers to."

"Her name is Minnie," he replies.

"I read about uh female named Minne Haha oncet," I states, sorta offhand-like.

"This one answers to Summers," he tells me, "and she's some girl! Uh danged old sourdough like me ain't noways fit fer her, Ike, but dog-goned if she didn't tell me she loved me."

He does uh portion of th' Piegan war-dance on th' wood-pile and then chases th' burrows clear down to th' crick. I reckon love must be worse than loco weed, 'cause he's already pilgrimed over twenty-five miles uh rough trail that day.

"Git uh ring?" I asks when he comes back.

"Did I!" he yells. "Well, yuh better believe I did. Paid uh hundred and fifty fer uh diamond as big as uh pants button and she's set in uh gold ring she can't wear out in uh lifetime. Bought it off Slim Jackson, th' faro dealer at th' Mint.

"I wanted to tie up right away, Ike, but she said next Tuesday. Yuh see she wanted to buy uh troosoo and all that kinda stuff. She was uh little shy on money, so I lends her uh couple a hundred—gives it to her, I mean. By golly, Ike, she can have all I got! Why don't you git married, too, and then we'll all live in th' same wickiup, Ike?"

"See anybody else down there?" I asks, ignorin' his foolish question.

"Let's see—uh-ha, I seen that danged ol' woodchuck, Tellurium Woods. He's back again and was all dressed up like uh plush horse. Even had them cloth things over his shoes and smokin' uh seegar. Darn old misfit's sailin' high with th' money I made for him by saltin' his old copper prospect. I meets him on th' street, but him and me don't wau-wau none a-tall. Honest, Ike, I gotta plumb sit on my gun hand every time I sees his onery ol' face."

Well, sir, from that time Magpie don't exhibit no more brains than uh fool-hen. When he ain't sighin' way down in his boots he's singin'—that is, he's yellin' th' words uh two songs and th' tune uh neither. And when he ain't doin' that he's oratin' about bungaloos, geeraniums and chiny dishes. I'm plumb disgusted with him. When uh feller uh Magpie's type gits in love it's worse than uh floatin' kidney—yuh kin anchor th' kidney.

On Sunday night he can't seem to sleep none, and finally gits up and leaves th' cabin, and don't come back until I'm jist about finished eatin' breakfast.

"Beautiful night, Ike," sez he. "Finest moonlight I ever seen."

"Magpie Simpkins," sez I, "yore as crazy as uh shepherd, and if yuh don't shake yourself it will only be uh few moons until yuh will be drillin' fer soap in th' asylum at Warm Springs. Far be it from me to laugh at love, pardner, but I'll be hanged if I'll stand fer yuh kissin' that old he burrow. He's half mine and——"

"Ike," sez he, reachin' absent-mindedly fer th' ax, "that's uh danged lie. I never kissed uh jackass in my life."

"Then yuh shore got th' edge on Minnie," I returns, and beat th' ax to th' corner of th' cabin by uh hair.

One nice thing about Magpie is th' fact that he don't hold uh grudge and I'm safe to come back in an hour.

Uh course I'm elected to be th' best man at this weddin', which means I'll have to git my boots greased, buy uh new necktie and keep reasonably sober. Also, I've got to stand in front of th' Gospel Peddler alongside uh Mrs. Cobalt Jones—th' same bein' several degrees worse to look at than th' squaw I knowed down at Yuma.

TH' DAY before th' happenin', that bein' uh Monday, me and Magpie packs th' burrows and hits th' trail fer Piperock. Magpie drills along uh mile or two in front until we gits almost in sight uh town and then he drops back and sits down on uh boulder.

"Ike," sez he, wipin' his face on his sleeve, "I'm gittin' plumb nervous. Sorta

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gun-shy, I reckon. Th' more I thinks about it th' worse it seems. I wants to git married, Ike, but every time I thinks about me bein' up there in front uh that preacher feller and sayin' 'I do,' dog-gone it, I gits buck fever."

"Well, old-timer," I remarks, "here's uh good place to turn th' outfit around and make uh getaway."

"Not any a-tall!" sez he. "I don't buy diamonds and loosen up my roll fer uh troosoo and then stampede. Lead on, McDuffy, and danged be he who first yells I gotta plenty!" Which is uh favorite sayin' of Magpie's.

I prods th' leadin' jack and we pilgrims on down th' trail toward town.

We're almost into Piperock when we sees uh little feller comin' ploddin' up th' trail toward us. He's sort of uh runty little party with rusty whiskers and most awfully bowlegged, and when he gits closer we sees that he's packin' uh sawed-off ten gage shotgun.

He stops uh few feet in front of us and shifts th' hardware to cover our hull outfit.

"Say," sez he, "which one uh you specimans is Tellurium Woods?"

"Yuh danged little imitation of uh crokay wicket!" yells Magpie, droppin' th' lead rope and startin' forward, but th' riot gun covers him and he stops sudden like. "What do yuh mean by that question?" he roars.

"Hurry up and answer!" roars bowlegs right back at him.

"Neither of us is that polecat!" snaps Magpie. "And what is more and conclusive, I kin lick you and th' funny party or parties that sent yuh out here to ask it."

I sees that th' little feller is sorta overcome like, and not knowin' how easy that scatter gun is on th' trigger, I steps in sorta soothin' like and tells him who we are.

"What do yuh want of Tellurium?" I asks.

"Dang his measly hide!" wails th' feller. "I aims to shoot his old hide into shoestrings. I'm plannin' to pulverize his system with buckshot and I'm hopin' this here gun don't scatter so much that he will miss any of th' contents."

"And th' reason fer his demise?" I asks.

"Dang him, he done stole my wife!" yells th' little feller.

"Tellurium Woods stoled yore wife?" parroted Magpie, reachin' over and appropriatin' th' hardware. "Well, well, don't cry, little feller. Any danged woman that would run away with that old hedgehog ain't worth cryin' over a-tall. Come on back and have uh drink. Uh drink uh hooch will make th' world seem brighter."

"I know I'm foolish," he agrees, "but it ain't a square deal. We been married over five year now and she's been uh kind, lovin', thoughtful wife until now. We was in business down to Curlew, and when th' mines shut down our business went busted and so did we. She gits uh job up here and I stays there to settle up th' business, and when I comes up here she's gone. 'Dang it all,' I sez to her when she was leavin', 'Minnie,' sez I, 'when yuh gits——' "

"What name?" interrupts Magpie.

"Minnie," sez th' little one. "My name is Summers, Gus Summers, and I sez to her——"

Magpie shoves th' gun back into th' little feller's hands and pats him on top of his rusty old derby hat.

"Good huntin' and good luck to you, Summers, old scout," sez Magpie, who is jist uh little white around th' gills. And then he kicks th' lead burrow in th' wind and turns him around toward th' back trail.

We gits about half-way back to th' cabin when Magpie stops to fill his pipe.

"Ike," sez he, "that Tellurium Woods is uh——"

"Friend in need," sez I. "Fifteen buckshot to uh shell, and two shells, make thirty holes."

Magpie is silent fer quite some spell and then he sticks out his hand with uh smile.

"Ike, old pardner, shake. We may be deerylicks uh th' hills, me and you, but—say, did yuh notice her husband was wearin' bailin' wire instead uh pants buttons?"

. . . . . .

"Say, I been noticin' smoke comin' out of th' stovepipe fer quite uh spell, Mister Norwood, so I reckon Magpie's normal once more. Come on down and taste beans cooked scientifically."

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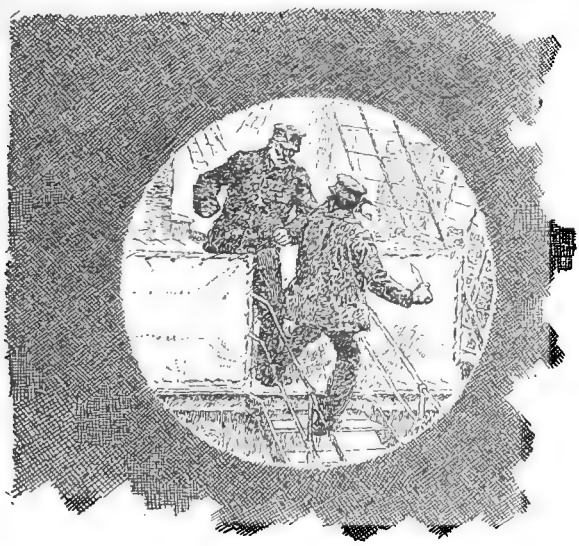
THE OCEAN-BORNE



A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Samuel Alexander White

Author of "The Posts of Pillage," "The Spoilsman," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE SEALERS' SAILING

"GOOD-BY, Navista, and don't grieve, lass," soothed Captain Clode. "Come the thirtieth of April, or maybe before, you'll see me and the *Ulric* again. Aye, and we'll bring such a trip of seal-fat back from the ice-fields as never came into St. John's!"

"I hope so, father! Oh, I pray so!" whispered Navista.

Standing on tiptoe on the crowded wharf, she clung to him a moment, her girlish figure half hidden in his bulky sea clothes, then stepped unsteadily aside to let him pass aboard the great steel steamer which, massive-hulled and heavy-engined, was built after the fashion of an ice-breaker for the ice work it had to do.

There was a pang at her heart as, through the twilight gloom of the March morning, she watched the bulky blur of his figure ascending to the bridge. For in the womenfolk of the men who go down to the sea in ships there is no love of the sea—there is only fear, and of all coastwise folk Newfoundland women fear it most. And because she was a Newfoundland woman, and because it is given to the motherless to feel the deepest individual apprehension, her eyes suddenly blurred with a tear mist that hid all things in the harbor.

She put up a hand to clear her sight, but before it reached her eyes she felt another great hand slipping into it, and, startled and steadied, she gazed on heavy-faced, heavy-framed, blue-sweatered, sea-booted Froude Boime, first mate of the *Ulric*—Froude Boime who was physically, mentally and morally set, and stolid as a rock, and who ever and unavailingly tried to make her lonely life less lonely.

Hailing from the solitary outport of Bonavista, Boime knew loneliness in its essence; and in so far as a man not overblest with imagination could feel, he felt for the girl who, through perhaps six full weeks of solitude and anxiety, must await the outcome of the most perilous voyage on all the Seven Seas.

"I be sorry, Navista," he spoke simply, in the dialect which was his Bonavista heritage, "but 't be th' way o' th' sea. Th' menfolk must earn th' bread for all, and there be no earning 't 'less we goes along o' th' floes."

"I know that, Froude," faltered Navista, unconsciously tightening her hands on Boime's, "but don't let him take overdangerous chances. He knows your seamanship, and he always listens to your

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advice. So promise me to counsel him against taking those chances."

"I wills that, Navista," he promised ponderously.

"And oh, Froude," she went on a little breathlessly, "I wish he had put the wireless aboard the *Ulric!*"

"Well, Navista," pondered Boime gravely, " 't do seem that th' *Ulric* costed a lot o' money as she lies, and wireless equipment be wonderful extravagant. Besides 't be not much use, except along o' th' vessels themselves, after we goes out o' range o' th' wireless station at Fogo Island. You cans not call th' land after that."

"Still it's a link a third of the way down the east coast, going and coming, and a God-created blessing, Froude, in time of disaster."

"Aye, 't be that, but Heaven send there be no disaster to us this trip! 'T be no time for courting risks, for ironclads costs money, and you knows th' *Ulric* be partly unpaid for. Last year were a poor year. A good season and a full cotch be what we needs, and, please God, Navista, we wills have 't though there be a bad omen on our bow!"

He pointed a thumb at the vessel moored next the *Ulric*, and Navista uncomprehendingly ran her eyes over the lines of the ship. It was a wooden vessel, and though its rail ran about as high as the *Ulric's* it was not so large, being squat, broad of beam, ponderously strong, with a solid bow six feet thick and a stem shod with bands of iron. Yet, the light being none too good, Navista could not identify it as one of the St. John's fleet. Her first swift assumption was that it might be a Conception Bay sealer from the east coast of the island, but the next moment that assumption was dispelled by the sight of the name *Ile d'Argent* glaring white through the dim morning twilight.

"The *Ile d'Argent!*" she exclaimed. "Burgeo Savoyard's ship!"

"Aye, th' Pierrais's ship," nodded Boime, "come in some time last night, fresh from his smuggler's hole o' St. Pierre."

"And St. Pierre, *mon ami*," an insolent voice called down on them from a height, "is much better than the stinking fish flakes of Bonavista. *Diable!* what is Bonavista that one of its whelps should grow so critical?"

They looked up quickly to see Burgeo Savoyard leaning over the bridge rail of the *Ile d'Argent*, his tall, swaggering figure hanging out in an attitude of challenge, his head thrown back till his hawk nose poised threateningly like the beak of a bird of prey.

"What is Bonavista?" he repeated. "A few rocks on a horn of the east coast! It is the place *le bon Dieu* forgot when He made the island, for He put no decent harbor there. That's what Bonavista is, Froude Boime, and you are not of so high a station that you should hold the hands of a St. John's woman, or slander a man of St. Pierre."

"Everybody knows 't be because I does at this minute what you cans not do, that you feels so ill," retorted Boime. "And I slanders no man. Smuggler you be, Burgeo Savoyard, and many more dark things that people hints, and I warns you to watch how you lays your course on th' seal hunt. For neither th' *Ulric* nor any other ship o' th' fleet wants you meddling with her kill."

"The *Ulric*—bah!" spat Savoyard, speaking rapidly as he heard the steel steamer's whistle announcing readiness for the start. "Don't look for a catch in that clumsy ironclad. She won't get enough skins and blubber to pay for her coal, and her crew will come home with maybe five dollars each in their pockets as wage for six weeks' work. The *Ulric?* Bah, again! It's only a proper sealing ship like the *Ile d'Argent* that can bring in the seals. *Par Dieu*, you'll see—" shaking his fist after the two moving farther up the wharf along the ironclad's side—"Burgeo Savoyard will be first on the Grand Banks floes, and Burgeo Savoyard will be first back to St. John's. It's the *Florizel's* record of forty-nine thousand, eight hundred and ninety-three seals made in nineteen hundred and ten that I'm after, and by the bones of *le diable*, I'll beat it. And when you see me sail in with a one-hundred-thousand-dollar catch and the *Ulric* with empty holds, you, Froude Boime, will change your tune and you, Navista Clode, will condescend to take my hand."

"I will not," flashed Navista over her shoulder as Boime, with a final hand-clasp, sprang on to the *Ulric's* decks. "I am as close to you now, Burgeo Savoyard, as I ever want to get. Froude spoke the truth of you but not all the truth. Not alone a smuggler are you but a raider of the seas, a breaker of fishing and sealing and all other laws, and such a near-pirate as you may be with a British gunboat in the harbor!"

She turned her face back to the *Ulric's* bridge and waved her hand to her father as

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the first mate joined him, and Burgeo Savoyard's bellowed reply was drowned in a sudden pandemonium of sound. For in that moment Navista saw the sealing fleet beginning to move, and her ears were filled with the raucous clonk-clonk of cables, the squeal of hawsers and the many-noted shrieking of siren whistles.

TWENTY - ONE steamers she counted, six of them bound for the Gulf of St. Lawrence to search the floes that drifted southward through Belle Isle Strait, the remaining fifteen bound for the Grand Banks' waters to scour the whole seaboard of the east coast down north to the Labrador.

They were swinging off swiftly in the race through the land-locked harbor to its entrance at the Narrows, and, crowding the bulwarks and fighting for points of vantage, nearly three thousand men aboard shouted farewells to thousands more ashore. And the answering clamor of those thousands round about, her thrilled Navista's fibers, tugged strangely at her heart and sent the tear-mist again to her eyes.

She knew that there were but fifty thousand full-grown men in all the island, and to send down to the sea in a body three thousand out of fifty thousand was a heavy toll. There was no home but was touched by that toll this tenth of March, and as her moist eyes traveled over the throng immediately surrounding her, she marked none, save one, who was not a Terra Novan, with the Terra Novan's hope and pang at the sailing.

The alien was a man, a young man, great-shouldered, strong-bodied, in the act of stepping into a motor boat tied to the pier at her feet. He boarded the craft with the ease and surety of a person long accustomed to boats, and Navista saw at a glance that he was one who earned his bread by seafaring. But though his frame was so huge and his limbs so powerful she noted that there was no roll in the legs, no bend in the arms such as she had commonly seen in sailors. He carried himself straight and true as the poise of a mast, and there was that about his face, almost an aristocratic face under its bronze, which stamped him as one who had authority over men.

Either a sea captain or first officer she concluded mentally, as her eyes puzzled over him. He was wearing oilskins on top of a heavy woolen sweater, and as through the gaping of the oilskin where the top snap was unbuttoned, Navista saw the word BOSTON stamped across the sweater's breast, she suddenly remembered having heard her father speak of him the day before.

He was a Boston man, the most hoggish of all the hoggish Yankees, so her father had bruskly said, Ira Laurentide by name, Captain of the sealer *Golden Gull*, and owner of it and a dozen other fishing and coasting vessels.

For seven years in succession he had come north for fish and seals to Newfoundland waters. Good catches were a habit with him, and it was very natural that Terra Novan captains should resent the presence of the luckiest of all the American skippers who intruded from the South.

Navista had often heard of Captain Ira Laurentide, but never before had she seen him, because he always made his headquarters in Conception Bay to the northward. But this year disaster had overtaken him on the way up. Heavy drift ice had forced the *Golden Gull* on the rocks by the Bay of Bulls. At this very moment, Navista knew, salvage tugs from St. John's were at work on the wrecked vessel trying to save the remnant of her while her Captain had left her only long enough to run into St. John's in the gasoline launch to witness the sailing of the sealing fleet.

In Laurentide's face alone was no hope or pang. Cut off from participation in the seal hunt at its inception, he was full of gloom, and Navista wondered whether the gloom was caused by the thought of financial loss or because he joyed in the sea and was denied the hunt.

Even while his boat darted out in the wake of the sealing fleet, she fancied it must be the latter cause, for she saw his gray eyes grow wistful as he gazed after the ships. Then the next moment he and the ships and the harbor itself—all were hidden under the pall of smoke belched forth from over a score of funnels.

CHAPTER II

THE WRATH OF BURGEO SAVOYARD

NAVISTA knew from experience that there was nothing more to be seen from the wharf, for the ships would be out of the Narrows before the smoke pall which

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fogged the harbor could lift, and she threaded her way swiftly out of the crowd and darted along the walk which skirted the edge of the rocks.

About her, like a giant amphitheater, the gray-and-white city rose up against the curve of the hill, till it lost itself in the impenetrable green of the spruce far above. To the north loomed the six-hundred foot ridge which shut off broad Conception Bay and Belle Island, and from that height Navista knew that through the binoculars which hung from her shoulder, under her ulster, she could keep the fleet in sight for many miles to the eastward, upon the vast Atlantic.

So she ran rapidly along the ledge at the base of the hill as far as the fishermen's cottages, straggled out toward the outer entrance and then turned up the steep. It was a stiff climb in her haste, but she had the limbs and the chest that generations of sea-bred had handed down, and she made it without a pause.

She came clambering over the irregular face of the rocks, and, her breast heaving, her fair hair flying and the color flaming in her rounded cheeks, clapped the binoculars to her glistening eyes.

She stared upon a slow-heaving sea covered with field ice, speckled with towering bergs and cleft in the center with an irregular lead of open water winding black as a river of ink. The sealing fleet had not yet emerged from the Narrows, which was hidden by the bulging face of the cliff, but other vessels were afloat, some away in the offing, some close inshore.

Far, far off in the direction of the Grand Banks, so far as to be barely recognizable, Navista made out the Furness liner *Eagle Point*. The vessel had sailed the night before, bound from St. John's to Liverpool, and the fact that it was still in sight told that the field ice was very heavy and that the menace of the bergs was very great. Even while she looked a monstrous berg, drifting across the liner's wake, blotted it out, and upon the seas to the eastward was visible only the rising, falling, harshly-grinding floes.

But nearer at hand drifted a Miquelon brigantine making southward close-hauled in the strong morning breeze. Against the northern horizon spread the wings of a schooner beating like a sea-bird down toward the Labrador. While right beneath her the mail-boat *Prospero*, home from its run to Battle Harbor, was heading straight for the Narrows.

For an instant only she saw them, so ephemeral was the path of these puny craft across the azoic waste of ice, then the schooner's wings went out in a sky filled with the loom of bergs, the brigantine disappeared behind Cape Spear and the South Side Hills, and the *Prospero* seemed to dive through the very heart of the cliff as it steamed into the harbor entrance.

She heard the signal-gun of the lower station boom to announce the mail-boat's arrival, and for a moment thereafter, awaiting the breaking into view of the fleet, she was alone with the ancient rocks, with before her a sea and a sky that stretched unbroken to the old world whence her colonial forefathers came. It was here from Cabot Tower that the new world first called the old by wireless, and, standing on the top of the dizzy rock portal which with Cape Spear guarded the gateway of the Narrows from the fury of the ocean, Navista felt her spirit leap out like the wireless in one inspired moment and bridge the gap of space.

For the blood of the Devon adventurers, half traders, half pirates, swashbucklers and rovers of the seas who had first landed on the lonely Island coast ran in her veins, and the pride of four hundred years of freedom filled her glowing heart.

Four hundred years was a mighty period for her girlish mind to dwell upon and behold her island still the same. Though superficial changes and modern laws had intruded somewhat upon life, customs and ideals, there was no gainsaying the fact that Newfoundland was essentially the same.

As the French and the Portuguese came in the time of the Tudors, fished on the Grand Banks and took their catch home in salt, so men came now in the time of George the Fifth, and as the Spanish Biscayans in their tiny sailing boats hunted seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and along the Labrador coast, so now this very moment Terra Novan men sailed forth through the Narrows to hunt in their huge ships of steam.

Dwindled to toy vessels by the precipitate distance was the outgoing fleet to Navista's naked eye, but when she focused the glasses on them they assumed their normal proportions, becoming as large and

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clear as they had looked when lying moored at the wharves in the harbor. They were steaming for the most part in single file, driving at full speed in a mad race for the floes, making time while they could through the open lead, for no man could tell when a shift of the wind or a vagary of the current might close the water lane and jam them hard and fast.

Heading the race, Navista marked the *Bellaventure* and *Stephano*, big, powerful steel steamers of the modern type. Close on their heels flew the *Newfoundland*, one of the strongly-built wooden vessels with solid, massive bow. After her tore the *Eagle*, an old-style wooden ship of the whaler type which, men said, would go once too often among the Arctic floes. Then came more steel steamers, more wooden ones, and in the rear, racing neck and neck, the *Ulric* and the *Ile d'Argent*.

To Navista it was evident at once that her father's ship and Burgeo Savoyard's had fouled their chains in the harbor amid the fog of smoke, else they would not have been so far behind the rest nor upon such even terms with each other. Nor would Savoyard be dancing on his bridge in such a paroxysm of rage and shaking threatening fists at her father and Froude Boime upon the *Ulric's* bridge.

The binoculars brought Savoyard as close as if he had been denouncing her to her face. With the strength of the lenses she could see his every lineament ridged in malign lines. His sweeping mustache was bristling and his black eyes flashing fire, and her father's teeth split his scrubby beard with a show of resentment as he answered him back in kind.

Navista was aware that there was bad blood between the two, and she was also aware that she herself was the cause of it. For Burgeo Savoyard's aspirations ran the same way as Froude Boime's with regard to herself, and because he bore such an unsavory reputation upon the seas, Captain Clode had denied the Pierrais his house at St. John's.

Turbulent by nature, proud as the old pirate kings, quick to resent insult and interference, it needed only the fouling of the two ships to set Savoyard's wrath ablaze. It was plainly evident from his attitude that he was blaming the accident upon her father and demanding the right of way through the single open lead which ran across the ice-field, and it was just as plain to Navista that her father would not alter his course a point. She saw him shout something into the wheelhouse window to the wheelsman inside and then grasp the bridge-rail alongside of Boime as if to steady himself against a coming shock.

The next instant the two vessels tried to crowd at once into the narrow lead. Their rails ground together, but once with her bows in, the *Ulric's* superior tonnage proved too much for Savoyard's vessel. Navista saw the *Ile d'Argent* forced over to port and pinched sharply against the edge of the floe.

And as the rails of the two sealers hung together she saw Burgeo Savoyard leap across and hurl himself up the *Ulric's* bridge-ladder. Her father sprang to meet him. His upraised fist drove hard into the Pierrais's face so that Savoyard staggered back. Then before Boime could interpose the two clenched, and the knife in Savoyard's hand flashed bright in Navista's lenses.

Even before Savoyard struck she uttered a cry of horror, and her second cry was a high-pitched wail as she saw her father lying limply upon the floor of the bridge with Boime bending over him and Savoyard leaping back across the locked rails before the two ships cleared and separated.

It all happened as swiftly as a gleam of light in the trembling field of her binoculars. The binoculars themselves dropped from her hands.

With agonized naked eyes she stared at the fleet, dwindled to still smaller toy vessels by the precipitate distance. Then with her breath coming in chokes she darted down the way she had come up.

CHAPTER III

THROUGH THE MENACE OF THE FLOES

MADLY, recklessly, she flung herself down the frowning face of the promontory, tearing through little patches of tall, sere, ribbony strep grass, through frozen clumps of red partridge-berries, sliding over the bald tri-colored rock-points glinting purple, emerald and dun in the nebulosity of the dawn, and lowering herself with an unconscious surety from one rain-tunneled crevice to another.

She did not know where she was placing her feet or hands, but some invisible fingers

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seemed always to guide them to a grip of safety. Where in cool sanity she would never have ventured lest a moment's dizziness plunge her off into the sea six hundred feet below, she now clambered without a quiver.

She had no thought of herself, of her own peril in the precarious descent. She thought only of the horrible thing she had seen miles out at sea, thought of how quickly she could reach the harbor's edge and of what boat she could get to follow.

Down, down she dropped, the moan of the wind and the plaint of the sea on the outer rocks momentarily growing louder in her ears—down, down, her wild eyes sweeping the harbor as she descended near the neck of the Narrows. The pall of smoke from the sealing steamers had lifted, and, framed by the gray wharves and somber rock beaches, the harbor lay like a silver mirror.

Against the wharves the mail-boat *Prospero* was rubbing her ice-sheathed side as she made fast her moorings. Out in mid-anchorage rode the British drill-ship *Calypso* amid fleets of ocean and coasting steamers and Bankers and Norwegian schooners, blue as artists' fancy-boats, under the magic color of the coming dawn.

But the beauty of the harbor vista could not thrill her in that moment. She gazed on it in despair, for she could see none of the small coasting boats she had hoped to find near the shore just within the shelter of the Narrows, boats whose skippers she knew, great-hearted men who would at a word of entreaty rush her out in the wake of the *Ulric*.

She gave a moan of utter dejection and as a last resort turned to run back along the ledge toward the wharves where the *Prospero* was lying. But as she turned, the *pull-pull-pull* of a motor sounded in the Narrows, and, staring, she saw the power-boat of the Boston Captain Laurentide, in which he had come in from the Bay of Bulls, swing round the rocks directly beneath her, on its course to sea.

Her moan of dejection changed instantly to a shrill cry of gratitude, a cry that was pitched high and loud as a hail to the man below. He looked up at the sound, and Navista, waving her hands for him to stop, dashed down the remaining one hundred feet of the incline.

Here was the last handful of fishermen's cottages giving up the effort to struggle farther outward towards the harbor entrance where the huge rock portal shot up so sharply. She ran among three or four box-like houses, between the startled men and women working at the caulking of the dories in the tiny yards, past the rude spruce sheds where the fish were stored and out upon the skeleton-like flakes straddling into the water.

"My father!" she cried. "He's hurt on the *Ulric*. It was Savoyard—when the ships jammed in the lead."

"The Pierrais on the *Ile d'Argent!*" exclaimed Laurentide, an expression of anxiety succeeding in a quick surge the surprise upon his bronzed upturned face. "I've heard a good deal of that fellow on the coast. He fouled the *Ulric* in the harbor here just as I was trailing the fleet. He and the *Ulric's* captain were having hot words then."

"Yes, my father—quick! I'll jump from here!"

"Oh, your father! I didn't catch all your words at first!" he returned, as he ran the boat close to the platform of the fish stage and the girl dropped into the cockpit beside him. "Then your name must be Clode!"

"Yes, Navista Clode, and for God's sake take me to him as fast as your boat can go. I saw it through the binoculars—Savoyard springing over the locked rails and onto the *Ulric's* bridge with a knife and my father dropping in a heap."

"Good Heavens, the brigand!" Laurentide gasped, the anxiety on his mobile-featured face abruptly deepening into gravity. "But I'll get you there if the ice doesn't completely bar us."

He was whirling the steering-gear as he spoke, and the power-boat, foaming sharply off the rocks, shot out through the Narrows.

"I don't like croaking," he shouted in her ear as she bent her head against the wind, "but suppose the ice does bar us, you can call the *Ulric* with wireless from the land, can't you?"

"No," replied Navista, "the *Ulric* has no wireless. It was one of the last things I was speaking of to Froude Boime, the first mate, wishing my father had installed it aboard and saying what a blessing it was in time of trouble. There must have been something prophetic in my words."

"But—" his speech came in jerks as the

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speeding power-boat struck the first long ocean swells rolling out from under the ice-fields—"if it's—anything serious, they'll—turn back?"

"They can't," declared Navista, screaming forth her words through the hurtling wind of their flight. "Don't you understand? That's—why—I'm going. A vessel having left port once for the sealing grounds can't sail again. The sealing law forbids it."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I forgot! Yet it's so! And look, the lead is narrowing! But by Heaven! we have to get there. Ice or no ice we have to get there. Hold tight! Don't put out your arm. Resistance of the water—at this speed—break it like a stick!"

NAVISTA could not speak any more for the shrieking wind, but she nodded comprehendingly, and Laurentide opened his throttle wide. Fast as they had come through the Narrows, their present velocity made it appear as if they had been standing still.

The explosions of the cylinders grew to a dull, continuous roar. The boat seemed to pick itself up bodily and skim the corrugated surface of the water. Like a huge skipping-stone it traveled, leaping its full length in air across the hollows of the waves, striking the crests with resounding crashes and sending out a wash on both quarters that set the heavy ice-floes all a-quake.

Past Navista's eyes those ever-encroaching white floes flew like lightning, their sheen the sheen of driving snow in the air, while above the ice-line massive emerald bergs, all ornate cornices and fantastic minarets, plunged with the speed of express-trains across the first radiant forelights of the dawn.

"As fast as your boat can go," she had urged, but she had never dreamed of speed like this. The blood seemed about to burst her ear-drums under the terrific wind-pressure. Though drenched with spray, her tongue was hot and dry in her mouth as if parched by a desert wind. She could scarcely breathe, and the hull of the *Ulric*, miles ahead small as a toy-ship when Laurentide pulled his throttle open, leaped in a flash to huge dimensions.

Navista's brain was dazed with apprehension, excitement and the meteor-like flight, and her innate consciousness insisted that she must be the victim of an optical illusion, that she must still be seeing the *Ulric* through the binoculars without being aware that she was using them. But the gradual decrease in their speed and the sound of Laurentide's words ringing stridently, full of virile power, told her that they were indeed running under the *Ulric's* hull.

"We're making it," Laurentide was saying "though the lead's closing fast. They see us also. They've heaved to and are letting down a rope-ladder, and I guess that's the first mate, Froude Boime, you spoke of, giving orders from the bridge.

"Quick! Stand ready to spring up when I touch her side. That floe's doing its best to pinch us, and we'll have to raise the boat out of its reach for a bit. Now!"

With deft hands he manipulated the steering-wheel and the throttle, planing at the last with a diminishing sweep that let him gently rub the *Ulric's* plates with his gunwale and stop dead underneath the trailing rope-ladder. He caught its lower rungs and steadied it while Navista ascended, all the while measuring with furtive glances over his shoulder the nearness of the floe.

The moment she was over the rail he gathered in the loose ends of the rope which were trailing in the water and bent down to fasten them to the timbers of the cockpit in order that the craft might be hoisted after him, but a warning shout from the crew above made him look up again.

He saw the great, jagged edge of the floe driving in within a yard of his head, and, dropping the ends of the rope, he leaped as high as he could up the rungs.

Even as he leaped the ice pinched the motor-boat against the *Ulric's* side beneath his feet, crushing it like a biscuit box, and as the crew pulled him and the ladder in with a run, he saw the last twinkle of the brass steering-wheel disappearing beneath the waves.

Navista's lugubrious face was raised to his as he hurdled the rail, and the rush of sympathy for his loss of the boat rising through her own deep trouble thrilled him greatly.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she cried, the ring of genuine regret in her voice. "You see—I've heard about the *Golden Gull*, Captain Laurentide, and now I've added to your loss. That launch was a wonderful one

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for speed, and I'm terribly grieved to be the means of making you lose it. But you know I should never have forgiven myself if I hadn't come."

"Yes, I know," he returned simply. "And I would never have forgiven myself if I hadn't helped you to come. The boat was a good boat, but I'd sacrifice many of them to help you like this."

"Thanks," breathed Navista, giving him a grateful hand. "My father spoke of you as a mercenary American without any interest in Newfoundlanders but the dollar-interest, but I see he was wrong. He didn't know you—really know you. I wonder how it is with him. I hardly dare ask. I hardly——"

She paused and gazed on the crew with eyes which apprehension had usurped again, but, embarrassed and in ominous silence, they dropped away, coiling the rope-ladder in their hands, and it was Froude Boime, coming down the bridge ladder with his granite face and heavy tread, who answered her unspoken question.

"I be not th' man to lie, Navista," he declared with an odd rasp in his big voice, "and I knows how you be not th' girl to want me to lie. Our captain do lie dead in th' chart-room yonder."

CHAPTER IV

THE WILL OF THE SEA

LAURENTIDE expected Navista to shriek or faint or give some other violent emotional evidence of the bitterness of the blow. He half put out his arms as a precautionary measure to steady her, but there was no sudden collapse of her physical being, no stark exposing of her soul in a primitive cry.

Only, her robust body seemed to shrink as if aged in a moment, till it leaned back against his big, oilskin-clad figure, and upon her face he saw the look he had seen upon the faces of ancient women of the island—the look that was the crystallization of the fear of the sea, the fatalistic countenance of a mother, wife or daughter bereft.

For it is inevitable that those who live so close to and so long by the sea must grow fatalistic, recognizing the narrow margin between life and death and ever looking for that margin to be crossed, and now Laurentide understood that she had feared this thing with a fear that was almost absolute certainty, that had something of forevision in it. He realized that she had practically *known* before ever they reached the *Ulric* or Froude Boime confirmed her fear.

And Navista appeared to take it for granted that he realized, for again she turned her strained face up to his with a flood of gratitude in her eyes.

"You understand?" she choked. "I couldn't bring myself to speak my fears, but I was afraid if I did not reach the *Ulric* I should never see him again."

And to Laurentide his act in getting her there suddenly loomed large as an act of portent, as the deepest, kindest, most humane mission he had ever undertaken in an all too selfish sea-roving existence. He looked down on her with an abrupt awakening of soul, with a first glimpse of real life pulsing tender, sorrowful and poignant.

"I think I understand," he replied. "I understand what it meant to you, what it means to you now. And I'm very, very thankful we didn't fail to make the passage. In the light of what I know now, failure would have haunted me all my life."

His earnestness and compassion brought a rush of tears to her eyes, but with a desperate effort she forced them back that they might not undermine the self-control which at that moment was her greatest need, and more for moral than bodily support she put a hand upon Laurentide's arm.

"Let me go to him now," she whispered.

Froude Boime stalking ahead, they passed across the deck between the ranks of the silent crew and ascended the bridge-ladder to the chart-room. On the door-step the two men paused with one accord, and Navista went in alone.

Through the open doorway Laurentide could view the interior of the room. In the middle of the floor stood the captain's table with its chronometer boxes, log-book, charts, pen and ink and miscellaneous litter of papers. Beside it gaped his empty armchair. On the walls were oilskins and heavier coats of fur for ice work, electric-light brackets, shelves of books, a long barometer swinging from a nail.

Another aneroid barometer hung on the bulkhead, and upon the couch beneath lay Captain Clode, as if he were asleep. He rested on his side, his face turned outward,

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his arms stiffly folded, his sea clothes, sea boots and cap still upon him just as Froude Boime had carried him in. His eyes were closed, the little seams and wrinkles around them showing whimsically as in life, and his scrubby beard was crushed in touchingly natural disorder upon the great chest that Burgeo Savoyard's knife had stilled.

The two men watched Navista kneel beside him and bury her face on his breast, and the mute, tense, passionate embrace of one arm which she put round him wrenched their very souls.

"I be glad there be no blood to stain her," muttered Boime bluntly. "What little were outside I haves bandaged, but th' bleeding be mostly internal. That telled me th' end from th' start, from th' minute Savoyard striked."

"But Savoyard—you'll have the law on him without delay!" whispered Laurentide. "You'll be turning about as soon as you get the chance and running into St. John's, and you can start a British gunboat out to lay the law on him!"

"There be no law that wills ever lay itself on him but th' law o' God," asserted the first-mate vehemently. "He be too cunning and too hard to catch in th' act, and this he woulds make a case o' self-defense. There be no denying that our captain striked him, striked him first at that, though th' Pierrais were over th' *Ulric's* rail and along o' our bridge with violence in his heart. No denying that, I says, for two ships' crews woulds testify to 't. Besides, we be not running back to St. John's."

"Eh?" demanded the astounded Laurentide. "Why? I know about the sealing law. I've sailed under it seven years. But in a case of this kind wouldn't the government waive the law and let you sail again?"

"I don'ts know," returned Boime. "I don'ts trust governments—much, and 't do mean th' bread o' too many mouths to take th' risk. The premier be away. Colonial Secretary Bennett be acting-premier, and there be no telling how Bennett mights look on 't. 'T mights look to him like a common brawl and he mights let th' *Ulric* suffer th' consequences o' her own seeming foolishness.

"If we hads th' wireless we coulds find out, but we haves not, and there be no ship with wireless in sight how we coulds signal to find out for us. They be all gone behind th' hummocky ice and bergs. Th' *Ile d'Argent* were the last to go, dodging past at full speed when I rings for a slowing down when th' thing happened."

"By Heaven! That's hard for her—not to be able to take him back to land!"

"Aye, 't be hard, but there be four other reasons why we cans not go. Your boat be foundered. Th' field ice be closed behind us, miles o' 't between us and St. John's. We mays lose our chance at th' seals if we don'ts follow th' other ships as fast as we cans steam, and over all there be our dying captain's commands. For mark you, Captain Laurentide—aye, I knows your name, you sees, and I knows th' lost *Golden Gull* from seeing you sail her so often on th' sealing-grounds—Captain Clode be our captain still. And he wills be our captain when th' waves close over him, and I feels that though I stands in his place on th' bridge his spirit wills come up from sixty fathoms down to guide th' *Ulric* through th' floes. So, more binding than any other reason, I says, be his last commands, and they be for Navista's ears. Come, Captain Laurentide, she do signal us."

Navista, still kneeling by the couch, was beckoning them, and, drawing Laurentide by the arm, Boime stepped in. They doffed their hats in the presence of the dead.

Boime stopped at the foot of the couch and dropped on one knee, his ponderous weight sending a quiver through the floor, and Laurentide, feeling his six feet of height a desecration in the face of their mourning attitudes, doubled low in the armchair by the table so that his head might be on a level with theirs.

"Did he speak, Froude?" murmured Navista. "Did he give any message?"

" 'My girl wills see—' these be his words as he fell, Navista—'my girl wills be watching from th' cliff through th' glasses, and she wills see. And, Froude Boime,' he says, 'she wills come to me if there be a craft in th' harbor quick enough to cotch us or a man great-hearted enough to drive her through in th' menace o' th' floes.' "

Boime paused.

Navista's eyes involuntarily strayed to Laurentide's, and under this unconscious tribute from a dead man who had held but a poor opinion of him, Laurentide felt the blood glow in his cheeks.

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" 'And when she do come,' he says, the first mate went on, " 'you wills give her my cabin and watch over her aboard till th' end o' th' hunt, for I coulds not rest in th' deep for th' fear o' Burgeo Savoyard seeking her out while there be no kin to protect her and carrying her off in his pirate ship.

" 'And when you comes back to St. John's, Froude Boime,' he says, 'perhaps she wills have a change o' heart and listen to you, and if 't be so then you wills at once set about taking th' right to protect her always.' "

Again the first mate paused uncertainly, his granite face softened with humility and in his eyes a beseeching expression which was almost a plea for forgiveness for fulfilling his duty to his captain by quoting his exact words.

Then as if afraid that his pause might be full of significance he hastily continued:

" 'And Froude Boime, you wills command th' *Ulric* in my stead,' he says, 'and you wills look after my share for Navista and give th' men their earned wage and attend to all things. And pray God you haves a good cotch, Froude Boime,' he says, and if ever a man sent an appeal along o' Heaven, Captain Clode dids then, 'so you mays clear th' debt that lies on th' *Ulric*, for th' ship be all my poor girl haves. And me—' " Boime's tone went low as a whisper—" 'you wills bury in clear water as my father before me were buried, ay, and his father before him!' "

There was a moment's silence in the chart-room, then Boime heaved himself off his one bended knee and stood upon his feet. He remained looking at Navista a little time, a tender light of compassion on his crag-like features, and presently opened his lips again.

"I be not th' man, Navista," he spoke softly, "to press any part o' your father's wishes upon you against your will, except to do my duty by him in th' main. So now we musts go and see what way th' ship be making, for th' ice do cut down our speed. When we strikes a pond o' clear water we musts carry out his command. Come, Navista, for 't be his will on top o' th' will o' th' sea that keeps you on th' *Ulric*."

"Yes, yes, Froude, his will on top of the will of the sea," echoed Navista brokenly as she arose. "And with you, Captain Laurentide—" putting her hand out to him as he too arose to leave the chart-room—"it is the will of the sea that wrecked the *Golden Gull* at the Bay of Bulls and it is the will of the sea that keeps you on the *Ulric*."

"Yes," Laurentide answered in a voice become strangely hoarse and quivery, "yes, the will of the sea!"

CHAPTER V

THE NARROW MARGIN

OUTSIDE the door of the chart-room the three were met by the second mate, a lean, lanky man with a Gloucester accent, an old scar on his cheek, and whimsical, screwed-up eyes which seemed wrinkled in a perpetual smile.

"Cap'n Boime, the lookout reports the lead closed dead ahead an' heavy field ice all abaout fa-ar ez he kin see," he greeted.

Boime started as if the second mate had struck him. His huge body recoiled against Laurentide's so that the latter put a hand upon his shoulder to steady himself. Then Boime straightened up, a hint of harshness in his ringing voice.

"I wills not reprimand you, Gembland," he broke out, "for I knows you speaks out o' thoughtlessness. But please remember I be not captain yet. I wills not be captain till——"

He paused and slowly swept a heavy hand toward the chart-room.

Gembland's whimsical eyes suddenly widened with deep gravity, and an abashed expression crept over his face.

"I axes yer pardon, sir," he returned with humility. "I wuz not rightly thinkin' o' what I wuz sayin'. I'm sartin I meant no disrespeck to the mem'ry o' Captain Clode."

"I knows that, Gembland, so we wills speak no more o' 't. Get all hands overside to clear th' way."

The second mate hurried off to summon the crew. Boime beckoned Navista and Laurentide up the bridge ladder, and as they followed him Navista looked at her companion in surprise.

"Does Froude mean that we're going to force a way through the ice?" she asked.

"Yes, we simply have to keep moving," Laurentide confided. "You see, it's a very dangerous thing for a ship to lie to in such a field as this with a strong east wind

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packing it in along the whole Newfoundland coast. The *Ulric* would catch it if it started to raft. You've never sailed in proper Arctic ice, Miss Navista?"

"No, I can't say that I have. One sees lots along the coast, but I'm afraid I'm quite ignorant of ice conditions when it comes to navigation amongst the floes."

"Well," returned Laurentide kindly, "you will learn a good deal before we see St. John's again. Stop just here by the bridge-rail and we'll have a good sight of the crew at work. They're going overside now."

The *Ulric* was making but little progress against the heavy pressure of the ice, and now she stopped dead to let the men clamber overboard. Two hundred and fifty in all Navista counted dropping on to the ice like a phalanx of lancers with long poles in their hands. A brawny horde they were—for the best men ever sign on with the stanchest ship and truest captain—the pick of the Colony, South Coast men of Dantsic, Placentia, St. Mary's and Trespassey, famed men of St. John's and East Coast men of all the outports from Harbor Grace to far St. Anthony.

As she gazed upon their brawn with her moist eyes, the first thing that struck Navista was the similarity of their dress. Black as sable their figures and long poles loomed against the gleaming white floes. Here and there shone an occasional lighter garb, but the mass as a whole bulked black.

Their very garb in color contrast to the floes seemed symbolical of the endless warfare they were compelled by the nature of their calling to wage against those floes, and as they inserted their poles between the massive cakes and the ship's side, Navista saw the cunning of long experience in their scientific work.

The strength of a quarter of a thousand men multiplied by the tremendous leverage of as many heavy poles soon told on the ice blocks which threatened to jam the *Ulric* fast, and a space of greenish-black water gradually appeared in front of her bow.

There were several especially heavy pans of ice ahead, pans too ponderous for even the poles of a quarter of a thousand men to move, and the second mate, who stood among the anchor chains directing the work of the men below, looked back for orders to Boime upon the bridge.

"Blow them up, Gembland," Boime shouted.

At the second mate's command a party of men under the boatswain, a big, blond Norwegian named Fahlun Stavenger, went forward with sticks of dynamite. They chopped holes in the massive pans, deposited the dynamite sticks, and, lighting well-timed fuses, scampered to safety across the farther floes.

A series of loud explosions like the roar of naval guns boomed in quick succession, and Navista saw shower after shower of ice fragments and geyser after geyser of salt water thrown high in the air. The pans rocked and heaved, abruptly showing seams and cross-seams upon their slanting surfaces, then each broke into a score or more of pieces.

Instantaneously the horde of men attacked the pieces with poles, riding them as river drivers ride logs in a jam and poling them to either side of the channel they were opening.

It was precarious work. Several times Navista exclaimed aloud as men lost their footing upon the slippery cakes they rode or miscalculated the distance between jumps and plunged into the frigid sea. But the comrades of these were quick to lend them aid with pole or hand. They came out dripping water and shedding fast-forming icicles, clambered swiftly up the ship's side, dived below for their crops containing their spare outfits, and within five minutes were dry-clad and back again upon the floes wielding poles as lustily as ever.

"That's wonderful work, Captain Laurentide!" declared Navista, thrilled even through her sadness. "I wouldn't have believed it could be done."

"It's not so hard when you know how," smiled Laurentide, "and the *Ulric* has the advantage of always working farther offshore. You see, with an east wind the closer inshore you are, the tighter the pack, and the farther out you are, the better chance you have of working your way from one pond of open water to another. We'll strike some soon, for after that heavy run there ought to be slack ice near."

BOIME crossed the bridge to the engine-room telegraph stand, sticking up through the bridge floor like an iron post through a pavement, and signaled for SLOW. The *Ulric* immediately began to creep along once more, the men on the floes on either side keeping pace with her.

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The first mate gave a calculating glance aloft, as if expecting a hail at any moment from the lookout. The lookout's stations were two, one barrel lashed to the top of the topmast and the other on the main.

From one or other of these positions it was the lookout's business to watch for seals and pilot the ship through rifts in the floes which at that height he could discover miles ahead, when nothing but close packs could be seen from the decks.

Navista's and Laurentide's eyes, following Boime's, saw that the lookout was now in the loftier crow's-nest, and while they stared up the man hailed the deck.

"Slob ahead, sor," he yelled in an Irish brogue, the only brogue Navista had ever heard come out of Newfoundland. "Ut lies nor'east two points. Pair av growlers in ut too, though they don't luk dangerous at all, at all!"

"Very well, Mauleen!" replied Boime, acknowledging the news.

He nodded judicially, as if in deep thought, and Navista once more turned an inquiring gaze upon Captain Laurentide.

"Slob? Growlers?" she questioned, picking out the unfamiliar words. "What does he mean by those terms?"

"Slob is practically the same as slack ice," Laurentide interpreted, "that is, ice interspersed with lakes of open water or wherever a ship can get channelway. And growlers are low, flat-topped icebergs such as——"

"Gembland," cut in the heavy voice of Boime, shouting to the second mate on the fore-deck, "you hads better use th' hawsers!"

Immediately long hawsers were attached to the bows of the *Ulric*, and, heaving the thick ropes on to their shoulders, the crew on the floes added their power to the power of the engines where it would have been dangerous to put on high engine-speed.

Till noon they towed thus, occasionally breaking off the hawser work to use the poles or dynamite, and with only a brief lull for the midday meal they threw themselves once more upon the hawsers before the erratic winds and currents could undo the work they had already done.

Navista, who refused all urgings to eat, remained alone on the bridge while Boime and Captain Laurentide went to snatch a bite for themselves. Then Laurentide came back to her side, and Boime took up his former post of authority where he could exercise supreme command in the fight against the floes.

By late afternoon it appeared like a winning fight, for, piloted by the necessary directions of the lookout whose chanted "East — east by nor'east — nor'east by north" was translated by the wheelsman into terms of port and starboard, the *Ulric* was nearing the slack ice.

As they drew close to the slack, Boime ordered the crew aboard, for there was no trusting the footing where the cakes of ice had so much play in the current, and though their work was hardly finished, Boime judged that the sealer's steel prow could finish it.

Between them and the partially opened channel down which he hoped to zigzag lay a floe apparently about three feet thick and several hundred feet in diameter. Beyond the floe floated the pair of icebergs sighted by the lookout.

"There do seem plenty o' seaway to pass between th' bergs if th' floe be shattered," spoke Boime to Laurentide. "So, though I don'ts like to shake th' chart-room too much, we wills ram her."

"Hold hard!" he added in warning as he gave the necessary signals for reversing and rushing forward again.

The *Ulric* struck the floe at full speed, but Boime had evidently miscalculated the thickness of the ice, for instead of seaming and cross-seaming and collapsing, the floe remained intact. The shock of the resistance slid the *Ulric's* forefoot out of the water on to the edge of the floe. The ship seemed to rear up and sit down upon her propeller, and as her bow slid off again, the floe shot forward like a colossal battering-ram against the base of the bergs.

The impact to the three on the bridge was terrific. Navista's hands and Laurentide's hands were torn from the railing. They were thrown abruptly to the bridge floor, and even while Laurentide fell he saw the stanchion Boime leaned against torn out at its base and the first mate pitched headlong to the deck below.

Laurentide sprang up with a bound, raising Navista as he sprang. Both were for the instant speechless from the shock. But although he felt somewhat dazed, Laurentide's brain was working well enough for him to understand that he was the only man on the bridge, with the ship running wild.

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The second mate and boatswain were both upon the fore-deck yet, where they had just come off the ice with the crew. There was nobody else at hand but the wheelsman, and he, even if he knew there was anything wrong, dared not take his eyes off the binnacle or his hands off the little brass wheel of the steering-gear.

Laurentide instantly realized that the responsibility was his and that a second's error in the judgment of time would make the *Ulric* scrap-iron at the bottom of the Atlantic.

For, over the heads of the crew who blotted out the foredeck in a wild scramble of terror, he saw the two icebergs beginning to careen. Growlers, the Irish lookout Mauleen had called them. Low, flat-topped bergs he himself had described them to Navista.

But although they were low in comparison with some sky-towering ice mountains he had seen, they looked as tall as the mainmast of the *Ulric*. Carrying seven-eighths of their bulk under water, unstably balanced, the battering-ram floe had disturbed their equilibrium. From midair, slowly, ponderously at first as a giant tree commences to fall, both bergs toppled over, and though the *Ulric* was one of the strongest steel ships afloat, Laurentide knew that under that double blow the sealer would be crushed like glass.

"Hold on to the rail, Navista!" he warned, using unthinkingly her first name which came so naturally to his lips.

He pushed her hands down to their grip and with a frantic leap reached the engine-room telegraph stand and banged ASTERN.

But there was no response. The *Ulric* leaped on into the face of the toppling bergs.

Astern he banged again, but it was evident that the shock of striking the floe had disarranged the electric mechanism, for the chief engineer and his staff below were letting the pistons pound away. In despair Laurentide grasped the deck speaking-tube, blew in a breath that was half groan and jammed his ear to the mouth-piece.

"Oh, aye, this is Glenaubin!" the Scotch voice of the chief engineer came up from the engine-room. "Did you signal ony? I dinna see a change on the face o' the clock."

"Astern!" yelled Laurentide, jamming his lips where his ear had been. "For Heaven's sake, full speed astern! Bergs dead ahead and careening!"

He heard Glenaubin shout to the second engineer something about the steam-valve. The next instant, with no throe whatever of the machinery deep down in the well of her engine-room, but with a violent shrinking movement of her steel plates and girders, the *Ulric* slowed, stopped and sprang astern—all, so it seemed, in a second. His hands gripping the speaking-tube as if they would crush it, Laurentide stared upward.

As a falling tree gathers speed, so the falling bergs gathered momentum, but the *Ulric* was already leaping backward like a fear-stricken human. Twenty feet behind her receding bow, the tops of the bergs crashed through the floe which had upset them and struck the sea with a commotion like an oceanic earthquake.

But appalling as was the nearness of disaster, Laurentide for the first time in seconds that seemed eternities felt his blood run warm.

"Stop!" he roared into the speaking-tube before the *Ulric* could grind off her propeller in the muddle of pans astern.

Ahead he saw a monstrous wall of water, thrown up by the Titanic collapse of the bergs, rise like a tidal wave. It poised the *Ulric* on high on its crest, threatening to fling her bodily on to the ice field whose edge she had all but reached in her mad flight, and it was some subtle intuition quite beyond his wit or will that made him dash his lips to the speaking-tube in a final command.

"Ahead—full!" he cried.

And the *Ulric*, her decks awash and a dozen men gashed by flying ice fragments, tore down the slope of the tidal wave between the dancing bergs and plowed into a lake of clear water beyond.

CHAPTER VI

AND THE BODY SHALL BE CAST INTO THE SEA

LAURENTIDE turned about from the telegraph stand to see Navista, all white and shaken, hanging on to the bridge-rail and Boime heaving his heavy body up the bridge-ladder.

"Are you hurt?" he yelled. "Are either of you hurt?"

"No," quavered Navista, "only frightened—a bit! But you, Froude! You had a bad fall. Are you——"

"No, nothing harmed," assured Boime,

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feeling his limbs all over as he tramped painfully across the platform of the bridge. "But I be all o' a bivvar (shake). I felled on a pile o' winch gear, and 't be none too soft."

He stopped, blinking in a brief spasm of dizziness and put a hand on the foreside bridge-rail to steady himself.

"But, Laurentide," he burst out with momentous gravity, " 't were a providential thing you be a seaman. Where woulds th' *Ulric* be now if there hads been a landsman on th' bridge? Thank God for your seamanship, Captain Laurentide, I says, aye and th' way you dids use 't."

"There was no chance for seamanship," Laurentide uncomfortably belittled. "It was luck, pure, unadulterated luck!"

"By the glory fits, Captain—" which was as near as Boime's strict moral code ever allowed him to get to an oath—"if you wills pardon my contradicting you, 't were not. 'T were presence o' mind and unerring judgment that saved Navista her ship."

"Yes, and it's the second time he's done more for me than I can ever repay," declared Navista impetuously. "Captain Laurentide, I don't know how to begin to thank you."

"Don't talk of it," pleaded Laurentide. "You've had plenty to upset you already. You mustn't think of how narrow a margin it was. And, Boime, what about the—the chart-room? Hadn't we better go in and see how things are?"

"We wills that—in a moment. Here be Gembland now."

He turned to the second-mate, who at the imminence of disaster had made a dash for the bridge and arrived on the run behind him.

"Gembland, you wills take th' bridge for a little."

"Yes, sir. Any orders, sir?" asked the second-mate breathlessly.

"Have th' chief engineer see about getting th' engine-room telegraph in working order. 'T be jammed. Have th' boatswain send th' injured men below to fix up their gashes, clear th' decks o' ice and ascertain if our forefoot be damaged any. While he be below he cans send Blogg, the carpenter, up with a pair o' spare oars, rope and canvas, needle and twine, and tell one o' th' coal-trimmers to bring up some old slices out o' th' bunkers."

"Very good, sir."

"And, Gembland"—Boime called over his shoulder as he led the way to the chart-room.

"Yes, sir?"

"You hads better tell Glenaubin, when you speaks to him, to cut th' speed down to half."

The shock of striking the floe had banged the chart-room door back on its hinges. It had also jarred Captain Clode's body from the couch, and as the three entered, Navista darted forward and made a pitiable attempt to lift it; but the men stooped hastily, took the unwieldy burden from her hands and deposited it in its former resting-place.

"I be sorry, Navista," murmured Boime contritely, "that I misjudged the floe and jarred him, but now we be in clear water and we haves th' chance to carry out your father's last command. We musts take th' chance while we cans because we does not know what minute th' floes wills be around us again. So wills you go along o' his cabin for his Bible and meet us on deck? There be a copy o' th' burial service at sea in th' Bible, which I shalls read. You knows his room all right and where he keeps th' Bible?"

"Yes, yes, Froude, I know," she whispered tearfully, understanding well that Boime made the request in order that she might be spared the sordid preparations for burial which must inevitably be made.

For a little she stood looking upon her father. Then she pressed her lips to the firmly closed lips down under the disordered beard and turned out of the chart-room to find the Bible in his cabin.

THE carpenter, Blogg, appeared with the things Boime had called for, and the coal-trimmer, black as a negro from his toil in the bunkers, brought up the slices, laid them solemnly and deferentially upon the chart-room table and departed again.

"Blogg, Laurentide and me wills lift him," directed Boime. "You pass th' canvas under—so! That be 't. Now give me th' slices."

The carpenter handed over the slices—heavy iron bars which were the coal-trimmers' tools for sizing lumps of coal too big to go in the furnace-doors. Boime laid them inside the canvas and folded the sides and ends of the canvas over.

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"Blogg, you wills do th' sewing, while we makes th' stretcher!"

Laurentide held one oar, Boime the other. They cut four three-foot strands of rope and tied them across from oar to oar. The carpenter finished his work almost simultaneously with theirs and got off his knees, the loops of twine he held in his mouth straggling oddly across his black beard. There was sweat on his forehead and a twitching about his eyes.

"It's did now, sir," he whispered hoarsely.

Slowly, reverently, Boime and Laurentide lifted the canvas bundle stiffened with the iron bars, on to the oar-and-rope stretcher, put the ends of the oars upon their shoulders and passed out upon the bridge. The black-bearded Blogg, with an inherent passion for neatness, mechanically picked up the scraps of rope and followed. As they went down the bridge-ladder, Boime spoke in a low tone to the second-mate who lent a hand to steady the descent.

"You wills lay to and summon all hands, Gembland!" he ordered.

The amidships or bridge deck of the *Ulric* was built much lower than the fore-deck. It was as if a giant knife had cut a great gouge out of the ship, commencing just forward of her superstructure and ending just forward of the mainmast. Here Navista joined them, her father's Bible in her hands, to accompany the strange bier to the starboard rail.

The two men set the handles of the oars upon the rail, each poising a blade upon his shoulder with one hand. With his free hand Boime reached for the Bible, opened by Navista where the copy of the burial service at sea was inserted. His broad, brine-seared thumb fastening down the sheet that fluttered in the wind, the sheet that was copied in Captain Clode's own handwriting, that Clode had in his time read over many another man and that was now to be read over him, Boime looked about.

Every hand aboard the ship had been summoned by the second-mate. The coal-trimmers had climbed out of the bunkers, the stokers out of the stokehold, the engineers and oilers out of the engine-room, the steward, the cooks, the waiters—all between-decks had joined them to swell the crew already swarming on the amidships deck and the fore-deck and perching on the covers of winch and windlass. The men gashed by the falling ice were there, with bandages on heads and cheeks.

The ship had stopped dead, and the wheelsman, letting her head swing slowly in the wind, was leaning far out of the wheelhouse window in obedience to the second-mate's command to view the ceremony. Even the lookout, in obedience to that same command, had swept the sea ahead to see that all was clear and run down the rigging of the mainmast to the level of the crowd.

Boime's eyes went back to the book where the cold northeast wind hummed and a few flakes of driving snow lodged and melted under the warmth of his hand, and in a booming voice, impressive in its intense solemnity, he began to read. A hush like the hush of the arctic seas when the breeze dies out and the frozen floes lie solid for one hundred miles descended upon the *Ulric's* decks.

The rudder kicked a little. The fore-foot cast up an almost inarticulate rippling sound as the bow swung round. The guys of the masts creaked now and then. But these noises struck like whispers upon the mighty, silent reverence of the men.

Boime's words rang clear from bridge to anchor-chains, reading the service without check from beginning to end. Clarion loud it sounded in Laurentide's ear only two feet distant, and the latter with a strange thrill of his being felt himself responding to this brief gospel that seemed to bind up in a few phrases all the essences of life and death.

As Boime's cry, like the cry of a prophet, went up repeating the key-words of the service: "And the body shall be cast into the sea;" and as across the stretcher he caught the first mate's big, eloquent gray eyes expanded like the eyes of an ascetic performing an ultimate rite, he understood that the burial moment was come, and slowly, very slowly he elevated his oar-blade in time with Boime's.

So low the *Ulric's* rail ran amidships that there was no discordant splash. Light as the air had received the flitting of Captain Clode's soul, the ocean received his clay.

And like the body he had cast into the sea Laurentide felt that in that regenerative moment he had cast away his old undedicated self, his former aimless existence. In a wondrous exaltation he realized that

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he could never again be the same careless sea-roving man who for seven years had come north to Newfoundland for the sole purpose of straining gold from its icy waters.

Gold! As if gold weighed against the precious, palpitating thing called life that had been suddenly revealed to his eyes. For years he had trafficked in dollars with the Terra Novans and never stopped to take a glimpse into their souls; but here and now he felt himself touching the very hearts of these Colonials and entering into the miracle of communion with them. Mere material gain was only dross compared to the sharp-etched impressions impacted on his mental and emotional consciousness since the moment the entreating voice of Navista Clode had hailed him from the rocks by Cabot Tower.

It was she, turning from the rail with her fatalistic blue eyes blurred by tears of mourning, who had abruptly drawn him out of the ranks of the sordid coiners of life into the ranks of the true disciples of life.

The glow of his exaltation seemed to strike her and fire her eyes under their tears as she gazed upon him, and in them Laurentide read the realization of his reclamation.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he whispered, moving to her side and taking her hands in the ensuing silence broken only by the soft shuffling of the lookout's feet on the rope rungs as he ascended again to his post. "It will always be the regret of my life that your father didn't live for me to know somehow, somewhere, and for him to come to know me—the real me that has been hiding under a mask. But you mustn't grieve, Navista. You must turn to life. I dimly see now the tremendous possibilities of life I didn't see before, and those possibilities stagger me. You must turn to it!"

"I know I must," Navista whispered back. "It's a duty, a Divine ordinance, and I think—" with a break in her voice—"the greater the tribute at death the less the sting. I shall never forget this scene—the silent tribute of these men, the voice of Froude Boime, what I read in your eyes. But you—you—" a mingled flood of varied emotions lightening her own eyes—"you must help me, Ira, to turn to life!"

And the voice of Froude Boime, standing with closed eyes and hand upraised over the sea, descended like a benediction on her whispered words.

"And now th' body be cast into th' sea, and according to his wish Captain Clode be buried with his father before him, ay, and his father before him. 'T be th' will o' God, and as surely as th' sun shines forth and th' tides do ebb and flow, th' law o' God shalls follow th' will o' God. Amen!"

Then, so narrowly margined from death, rising above it so immutably, the cry of life clanged in the lookout's hail from aloft.

"Seals, ho!" he bellowed. "Dead ahead!"

CHAPTER VII

THE DAY'S LOG

LAURENTIDE and Navista both started, so abrupt was the transition from the emotional realm wherein they groped into the realm of concrete actualities. They both looked at Boime, and the latter with his slower imagination came more slowly back to earth. He stared uncomprehendingly up the mainmast for a second, but as his eyes traveled down again and fell upon the stirring, excited crowd on deck, he shook himself out of his dreaming, and his voice rang authoritatively.

"All hands to their places!"

They jumped on the instant, for the sighting of seals in the face of such an inauspicious commencement of the voyage was a great relief and aroused in them the highest hopes.

"Ay, ay, Captain," they responded cheerfully.

Again Laurentide saw Boime start as if struck, even as he had done when similarly addressed by the second-mate Gembland on the bridge, but this time there was no reprimand forthcoming.

"Ay, Captain I be!" he nodded as if recollecting. "'T be a responsibility I cans not shirk. But wait, men, wait a minute. That do leave th' ship an officer short, and with work on th' floes to come 't be best to fill 't this evening. There be a man aboard to whom we all owes more than we cans ever pay, and if I coulds forget Captain Clode's dying order for me to command th' *Ulric*, I woulds give up th' post to Captain Laurentide. But I cans not forget, Laurentide, and you wills understand that that do leave th' position of first-mate vacant. Now I cans not ask you to relinquish your rank as a Captain,

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Laurentide. I cans not offer you th' lower position. So 't do remain for Gembland to——"

"I'll take it," interrupted Laurentide hastily. "I'll act as first-mate in your place. I don't want to be a passenger aboard. I want to help."

"By th' glory fits! That be generous o' you," declared Boime, giving him a ponderous hand. "And 't shalls be as you says, only there musts be no etiquette between us. I cans not have you call me 'captain' or 'sir'. We shalls be Boime and Laurentide to each other."

"Yes, that's more friendly," accepted Laurentide, returning the grip. "And if your second-mate had any thought of promotion, I hope he'll have no slighted feelings."

"Nary one," assured Gembland sincerely. "Ye wuz a sealin' cap'n when I wuz signin' fer my first trip to the ice-fields. Besides I ain't forgot haow you wiggled the *Ulric* aout from under them bergs, an' I knaow Stavenger an' all the men thinks ez me. So up with yer caps, men, an', preservin' all doo respeck to the mem'ry o' Cap'n Clode, three cheers fer aour new officers!"

Lustily the shouts went up from over two hundred and fifty throats, three cheers for Boime and Laurentide and a tiger for the sighted seals. Then they ran hastily back to their various positions while way was got on the ship and her head straightened till she was rushing again at full speed.

Laurentide feelingly gripped Boime's hand again, and Navista even more feelingly took the hands of both.

"I'm so glad," she murmured, and they knew she meant them both, the one for his loyalty and the other for his generosity.

"So we all be, Navista, and all be glad along o' th' seals! I wonders if 't be a large patch? I musts go aloft and see and take our bearings, for th' dark be so close that we cans not hunt them till morning. You hads better come with me, Laurentide, and see th' position o' th' patch."

WHILE Navista waited on deck to hear the men's report, Laurentide followed Boime up to the top of the mainmast. The lookout, Mauleen, was dancing joyously in his barrel as they ascended, his ruddy Irish countenance crimson with the whip of the wind, his eyes sparkling with the frost and his scrubby red mustache all iced up.

He had been relieved earlier in the day but had come on duty for another spell, and he was marvelously elated that the honor of sighting the first patch had fallen to him.

"There they ar-re, Captain," he shouted, shaking his binoculars in air, "south wan point now that the *Ulric's* head is straight. Yez can see thim wid the naked eye, dar-rk and all as the sea is getting. Luk—to starb'ord av yon healthy young berg!"

Boime and Laurentide stared over the ice-flecked sea in the direction indicated, and far, far off among packed floes that lay like solid land they could make out an irregular smudge of black upon the snowy surface.

" 'T be a sizable-looking lot, Mauleen," observed Boime.

"Four thousand, Captain, if there's a hairy wan, and wan-third av thim whitecoats. Luk at thim through the glasses, and yez can tell!"

"Aye, one-third, as you says," nodded Boime as he peered through the binoculars. "But th' whitecoats be no use to us. You knows th' sealing law do forbid us taking them till th' fifteenth o' th' month. But there be th' old seals, between twenty-five hundred and three thousand I shoulds estimate. Wills you take a look, Laurentide?"

He handed over the glasses, and Laurentide, turning them on the patch, made out a shifting, gamboling mass of black bodies.

They were nearly formless at that distance with what looked like blotches of snow between their ranks, but Laurentide knew from experience that the pale patches were the whitecoats, or young seals whose hide when born is pure white and does not turn really dark till they attain the age of four years.

"Too bad it isn't the fifteenth of March yet," he commented, handing the glasses back.

"Aye," nodded Boime regretfully, "their skin do make finer leather and their blubber finer oil than the old seals. But we cans not touch them before th' fifteenth. 'T be th' sealing law, and though there be some men afloat who cares nothing for th' law, Froude Boime be not one o' them."

And as they descended to the deck again, there came involuntarily to Laurentide's

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mind the thought of Burgeo Savoyard. He was one of those afloat who cared nothing for the law. How many whitecoats, Laurentide asked himself, would the Pierrais spare if he happened on them before the fifteenth?

He remembered Savoyard well from seeing and hearing him raging on the bridge of the *Ile d'Argent* when she and the *Ulric* fouled each other in the harbor of St. John's, and he wondered whereabouts on these ice-cluttered seas the near-pirate was steaming at that moment.

Savoyard's image rose easily on his mental vision, the handsome, insolent face with its sweeping mustache and fiery dark eyes, his tall swaggering figure that held at one and the same time the grace and the sway and the mobile strength of the sea, and with subtle forevision that was like some unfathomable magic of his surroundings creeping into his soul, Laurentide sensed the man as a shadowy enemy.

If for no other reason than that Savoyard coveted the girl waiting for them with upturned face on the deck below, the Pierrais was his enemy, and he swore a deep resolve that while his and Navista's days should be cast together there would be none, not even excepting Boime, standing keener guard than he himself between her and that menace.

Sweetly eager through her trouble, her face was questioning him as he came first down the rigging.

"Was the lookout right?" she asked. "It was seals?"

"Yes, a patch of four thousand or so," he joyfully assured her.

"Old seals?"

"Two-thirds of them. Boime and I were just wishing it had been the fifteenth of March. But we'll have to be content with old seals."

"Yes, Froude would not touch a whitecoat against the law, even if we all starved."

"Nor woulds you want me to, Navista," smiled Boime, stepping to the deck after Laurentide. "But we wills be after th' old ones before daylight tomorrow."

"With the boats?" asked Navista.

"No, the floes be too solid. Th' crew wills go on foot. Th' *Ulric* wills soon be on the outer edge o' th' pack now, and there we wills lay to for th' night."

"But, Froude, the seals must be miles from the edge," Navista ventured, "and the ice is too rough to see far ahead. How can they be found again?"

"With th' compass," informed Boime. "'T wills be Laurentide's duty as first-officer to lead th' men. I myself musts stay aboard to attend to th' navigating o' th' ship."

"Then, oh, Froude, why can't I go also?" demanded Navista. "I believe I'll go tomorrow. I want to see what luck the *Ulric* has at the beginning. In my present mood I don't think I could wait aboard. I'm going. The walk on the floes in the cold air will do me a lot of good, I'm sure."

Boime looked into her face wistfully.

"'T mights, Navista," he admitted. "If 't be calm in th' morning you coulds go, though I woulds not like to see you go in a strong wind."

"Why? What does the wind matter?"

"'T mights break up th' floes, and then you shoulds-be on th' ship. But if 't be calm and if 't be your wish to go, you hads better slip right off to bed as soon as you eats your supper. 'T wills mean getting up long before daylight, and you wills need all th' sleep you cans get."

"But I don't feel like eating, Froude."

"You musts eat, Navista. You haves eaten nothing all day. Unless you eats some supper and breakfast too, you cans not stand th' walk."

"Then I'll try, Froude. I'll try to eat something. I want to go."

"Very well, Navista. Run along to your cabin. I wills give Pondham, the steward, orders to serve your meal there tonight."

As she hurried off and they passed on to the bridge, Laurentide caught himself hoping that the day would break calm.

The second-mate paced the bridge, and to him Boime gave the orders for the steward to serve Navista's meal in her cabin and to send up his own and Laurentide's to the chart-room.

"You cans turn in also," he told Laurentide, "when we haves eaten and written up th' log. Your quarters wills be in th' first-mate's cabin, which were my own. You wills find 't very good. Though th' *Ulric* were especially designed for ice work and embodies many o' th' features o' ice-breakers, Captain Clode had her built so as to preserve th' general lines o' an ocean-going steamship."

"So I see," nodded Laurentide, "and

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she'll go into the passenger and freight service when the sealing season is over! But there is no captain's cabin for you, Boime, since it houses Navista, and I can't rob you of your own."

"You knows that a captain who sails in ice musts practically live on his bridge," smiled Boime, leading the way to the chart-room. "He musts eat and sleep and have his being here where we be now. Take that chair, Laurentide. Here be Pondham with the meal, and he cans fetch me another. Pondham, another chair!"

"Yes, sir, as fawst as I cawn, sir," bobbed the fat English steward, disappearing with a whisk of his rotund body.

He whisked in again with the chair, saw to their immediate needs and sent up a waiter to wait on them when it became necessary for him to go below.

By the time they finished eating, the second-mate appeared to report that the *Ulric* had touched the edge of the floes.

"Then lay to, Gembland," ordered Boime. "Tell Glenaubin to have his fires banked and bid all hands turn in to be ready for an early call."

He drew forward the log-book on the chart-room table and passed it to Laurentide.

Laurentide opened it at the proper page scored with columns for the ship's run, course, wind, and so forth.

"Since 't be a momentous day maybe I hads better scribble th' day's log in th' rough book first," Boime proposed. "Then 't cans go into th' log-book."

For minutes Laurentide watched him scribble with his thick sea-calloused hand.

Presently Boime passed the rough book across the littered table and Laurentide read:

March 10th, 1914:

Run this day, seventy miles. Course east by northeast. Lying to this night in ice near latitude 48. Thirty-mile wind, east by north, all day.

Remarks: *Ulric* fouled by *Ile d'Argent* off St. John's. Captain Clode killed by Burgeo Savoyard. Daughter, Navista Clode, taken aboard from sinking motor-boat with Captain Ira Laurentide. Captain Clode buried at sea 6 P. M. Seals sighted 6 P. M. Present officers in charge—Captain, Froude Boime; first-mate, Ira Laurentide.

Carefully and neatly Laurentide transferred it, column by column, to the log-book.

"There," he sighed when he finished, "never again perhaps shall I write such a full day's log!"

"No," pondered Boime heavily, "perhaps never so full again!"

CHAPTER VIII

INTERLOPERS

LAURENTIDE'S hopes were realized. The northeast wind died out before midnight, and at four o'clock the call came for all hands who were going on the floes.

Tremendous excitement prevailed aboard. For it was the high ambition of every sealer, whether he walked the bridge or lower deck, or toiled far down in the stoke-hold, to get a load of skins and fat and be first home to St. John's. His dream was to come in with all colors flying, rockets going up from the bridge and shouting crew on the bulwarks answering back the welcoming cheers of the wharf crowds.

So with breakfast bolted and all preparations made, they dropped overside an hour before dawn.

Two hundred men were in the hunt.

Laurentide had the bearings of the patch which he and Boime had taken when they were aloft the night before, and he led off with the compass.

Navista, warmly clad in a short fur outer jacket that had been hanging in the chart-room, walked at his heels.

Next came the Norwegian boatswain Stavenger, and after him streamed the rest of the men in single file.

A few hundred yards from the *Ulric* they lost her hull in the rough ice and her masts against the overcast sky niggardly sprayed with stars, and for what seemed a long period they were alone amid the loom of ice weakly glinted by the paling stars and the faint northern aurora. Frequently Laurentide consulted his compass and took great precautions to run a true course.

"I simply can't afford to miss the patch," he confided to Navista, "although I don't want to waste any more time using the compass than I can help. We have to strike the seals before they start to dip."

"How dip?" asked Navista.

"Dive into their blowholes," he explained. "These will be harp-seals, and harps never get very far from their blowholes. And they never live on heavy floes, such as we're tramping over, unless stranded there by a wind that rafts the ice and closes their blowholes. These heavy floes have been

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broken from the Greenland glaciers. The harps live on the young ice broken from the Labrador coast, and we'll know we're getting close to them when we come to lighter, flatter ice."

"Oughtn't we to be pretty close now?" she demanded. "We seem to have walked for quite a long time."

Swiftly Laurentide flared a match over his watch.

"We've been tramping for fifty minutes," he announced. "That means we must be pretty close."

"That is, if we've run a true course for them," Navista speculated. "It must be very hard to follow a compass in this ice."

"It is hard," he admitted, "but I'm sure we're on our course. I can't say how—a sixth sense, I guess. But I feel it all the same. You'll see Labrador ice very soon, for, look, the stars have gone, and the first gray of morning is showing in the clouds."

Ten more minutes proved him right.

As if they had arrived at the lip of a plateau, they came out on the edge of the rough, hummocky ice where it sloped through a jumble of up-ended cakes to meet the plain of young ice which the current had carried along behind it. And there, in a sort of salient that the drift had worked into the heart of the more massive floes, the patch of seals lay dark upon the crystal surface.

"Hah!" grunted Stavenger, the boatswain, as he stared over the shoulders of Navista and Laurentide, "you ban strike it fair, sir!"

And Laurentide's eyes gazed into Navista's and silently rejoiced with her sparkling ones that he had not failed to vindicate her confidence and Stavenger's, and the confidence of all the men.

THE men had halted in single file with the halt of their leader. Poising like bulky statues in the dawn, each with a coil of rope on his shoulder and an iron-tipped, club-like gaff in his hand, they seemed like mountain climbers scaling the glaciers of the world, and Laurentide felt his heart glow with pride that he had such men to lead.

"Stavenger, take half our number," he directed quickly, "and lead them along one side of the young ice yonder. I'll take the other half along the other side, and we'll have the patch surrounded. We ought to get quite a lot of them before they can escape through the blowholes. When I give a whistle, as a signal that the ring is nearly closed, dash in!"

The boatswain deployed with his section of the men, and Laurentide and Navista, taking care to keep out of sight among the hummocks, headed their section along the eastern side of the salient. But they had scarcely reached the point from which they could outflank the herd when they became aware of other black figures crawling forward through the rubble of ice.

The rising sun was still blocked by a cluster of bergs towering on the eastern horizon, but in the nebulous shower of golden mist which was the forerunner of its rays, Laurentide and Navista could recognize the crawling figures as those of men.

"Too bad," he whispered. "Some other ship has sighted the patch from a different direction, and now we'll have to share up. That's the custom."

"Oh, what a disappointment!" Navista exclaimed. "And after all your precaution! I wonder what vessel they're from?"

In a cautious call Laurentide raised his voice.

"Hello, what ship's crew is that?" he demanded.

"The *Ile d'Argent!*" was the low answer.

"My God, Savoyard's ship!" cried Navista all trembling as she seized Laurentide's arm. "And Savoyard—is he among them? Do you see him?"

For answer the foremost figure of the crawling line topped a small ice hummock and straightened up within a few feet of them, and they recognized the tall, swaggering form of Burgeo Savoyard.

The Pierrais' black eyes rested first on Laurentide's face in a puzzled gaze, but when that gaze passed on to Navista he gave a startled explanation deep in his throat and a flush swept from his smooth-shaven neck up over his prominent cheek-bones.

"*Mon Dieu*, Navista!" he burst out, with an elaborate sweep of his hand to his cap with its fur ear-laps, "It is you! A sealer sees many strange sights on the floes, but I should have thought to see mermaids, seanymphs, old Neptune himself, before coming upon you on the bosom of the Atlantic when I saw you last in St. John's. And you, *monsieur*—" with another puzzled glance at the bronzed skin and virile lines of Laurentide's face—"who *le diable* are you?"

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"Ira Laurentide, first-mate of the *Ulric!*"

"*Ciel!* He that was master of the wrecked *Golden Gull?*"

"The very same and now first-mate of the *Ulric*, I say," answered Laurentide in a voice that rang with iron harshness.

"Eh, you say so? Then what has happened Froude Boime?"

"Froude Boime is Captain. We buried Captain Clode last night!"

Savoyard started and swore in his native tongue.

"But it was an accident, Navista," he blurted in extenuation. "*Par Dieu*, I meant nothing but intimidation, a prick of the knife-point perhaps to gain my will. I swear it. You understand me? I am passionate, I know. I lose my head at times, and in the excitement of the race from St. John's and in the fouling I was ready for a brawl. But I swear——"

"Stop, Burgeo Savoyard, you hypocrite!" commanded Navista tempestuously. "Don't lie to me. I saw what was in your heart. I was watching from the cliff by Cabot Tower, and I saw through the glasses. I had the last glimpse into the soul of you that I ever want to have. And now get away out of my sight before I'm tempted to urge some one to kill you. If I weren't a woman and brought up by my father in the fear of God, I think I should do it. In the heat of the moment—" her hand instinctively slipping down Laurentide's arm to the gaff that he held—"I believe I could do it myself."

"But, *mon Dieu*, Navista——"

"Don't parley, you whelp!" exploded Laurentide wrathfully. "Get back across the floes with your men!"

"Do you lord the seas?" bristled Savoyard, fiercely glad to turn the rage that Navista's denouncing had aroused in him upon some legitimate target. "*Diable!* I didn't walk five miles to turn back without my share of the seals."

"You'll get no share from me," Laurentide told him. "I'd share with any other ship of the fleet but yours. We sighted these seals first, got up to them first and surrounded them first, and you'll never get a single hide."

"*Ciel*, then I'll take some!"

"Will you?" Laurentide ran his eyes calculatingly over Savoyard's men who had broken the single-file formation at the hint of trouble and bunched behind their leader. "You have something like one hundred men there. I have about the same number here. But don't think you have an even chance in a fight. Stavenger our boatswain is over yonder—" pointing to the other horn of the rougher plateau—"with as many more. You start anything and I'll call for him and your crew will get their heads broken instead of the seals!"

"So? You——"

Savoyard's action was more vindictive than his oath. With wonderful swiftness, and without betraying his intention, he suddenly swept upward the iron-pointed gaff he leaned upon. The weapon darted with a force that threatened to disembowel Laurentide, but Navista's sudden cry of alarm warned him in time.

The agility of the well-trained athlete was in his leap aside. Savoyard missed by inches, and, momentarily swung off his balance, he could not recover himself before Laurentide's own gaff struck him violently upon the side of the head.

Stunned, the Pierrais fell back among the ranks of his own men. An ugly growl went up from them, and they crowded forward menacingly with uplifted gaffs.

They were an ill-looking lot, the sweepings of the islands off the south coast, men of the secret ports of the Brunets, of Great Miquelon, of Little Miquelon and of St. Pierre.

A general battle on the floes seemed imminent, but before they could charge, Laurentide stepped forward in front of them and shook his weapon in their faces.

"Don't do it," he warned. "We're double your number, and nine-tenths of you will get just what Savoyard got. Neither Savoyard nor the patch of seals is worth the price. So pick him up and take him back to the *Ile d'Argent* before I call for Stavenger!"

The *Ile d'Argent's* men hesitated and fell back a little. They saw the grim front of the *Ulric's* crew backing Laurentide, and they were shrewd enough to understand that against double that number they could not hope to prevail. Moreover many of them knew the berserker nature of the gigantic Stavenger in a fight, and they had little desire to see him rush over the ice to the aid of this great, lean, muscled, bronze-faced, steely-eyed American sea-captain who had disposed of their leader so swiftly. So with much muttering and many backward glances they lifted up the senseless

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Savoyard and disappeared over the rough ice in the direction of the unseen *Ile d'Argent.*

CHAPTER IX

THE KILL

THE MOMENT the crew of the *Ile d'Argent* were out of sight, Laurentide blew his whistle for the attack on the seal herd, and simultaneously his own and Stavenger's party swung out upon the plain of young ice.

Both parties assumed the form of a half circle as they ran, and before the surprised seals were aware of danger the end of the half circles had met to hem them in. Already the clubs were falling on Stavenger's side, and the seals on Laurentide's side were flapping about in wild commotion.

"They're harps all right!" exclaimed Laurentide, rushing excitedly along with Navista. "See the black, harp-like markings on their backs! That's how they got their name. And they're the most valuable species. Quick, men, keep your line closed. Don't let any break through!"

"Where do you hit them?" cried Navista, who now that the moment had arrived for the kill, was as excited as any one else.

"Right on the end of the nose," he told her. "That's their vital spot, though a blow anywhere on the head will stun them."

His club descended as he spoke upon the nose of a big male harp making for its blowhole in front of him. The harp instantly collapsed, and after that Laurentide was in the thick of the slaughter with the rest of the men, while Navista was left upon the outside of the ever-closing ring.

The sun, revealed by the drift of the bergs which had masked it, suddenly flared like a crimson disk on the rim of the ice-fields and flooded the scene with carmine light. Under its brilliant glare the hunters' figures were silhouetted darkly, their gaffs rising and falling, their bodies swaying, poising on their toes for a downward stroke, or leaping in, midstride, to cut off some escaping seal.

The old seals, black as the enemies who surrounded them, even more agile than they, darted here and there searching for blowholes in the trap, both male and female sometimes bristling up, when cornered, with a show of fierceness quite alien to their placid natures.

It was all over with the abruptness with which it began. All the old harps had escaped or been clubbed, and Laurentide, panting a little from the vigorous exertion, leaned on his club and laughed at Navista playfully chasing a last bewildered whitecoat down its blowhole.

"Why, they're nearly as large as the old ones!" she exclaimed. "They must weigh fifty pounds."

"Yes, these whitecoats are of an early whelping," he informed. "You understand that the harp is a migratory animal. During its life it ranges many hundreds of miles through the Arctic and North Atlantic oceans. Sealers don't know much about its habits in the Arctic, but when the herds reach the Atlantic they do know more. The young whitecoats are born on the floes, of course, generally in February. They're weaned and take to the water about the last of March. And isn't it odd, Navista? They can't swim when they're born. They have to learn."

Navista stared at him in astonishment, half afraid that he was joking with her.

"Can't swim!" she echoed. "And born of parents that practically live in the water!"

He nodded confidingly.

"Just so! They're tiny, helpless, floundering little fellows at first. They weigh only a few pounds, but the rapidity of their growth is amazing. That fifty-pound one you chased is only four weeks old. You see he's able to shift for himself."

"Well," returned Navista, "it seems I have a lot to learn about seals and sealing. I've seen the vessels come and go every year, but I never took the trouble to study their catch very closely.

"You'll never have a better opportunity than the present one," Laurentide told her. "And I've noted already that you're a splendid observer."

He smiled his admiration, an admiration that was not confined to her powers of observation alone, but embraced her physical attributes of the moment, her frost-bright eyes, glowing cheeks, well-chiseled, animated lips.

And Navista seemed to understand that his admiration was not for her powers of observation alone, for she blushed demurely under his frank gaze.

"But you'll learn more about them when I get a chance to tell you some of the things I've seen," he hastened on, by way of relieving her embarrassment. "Just now is the

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time to skin the animals, for here is the boatswain coming from his count."

Stavenger, with the help of the men, had made up the tally of the bodies that littered the ice, and he stalked forward adding up figures in a tally-book as he came.

"Twenty-two hundred, sir," he announced. "It ban good kill for a start. Now Ay guess we shall skin?"

"Yes, go ahead," directed Laurentide. "We must have them done by the time the *Ulric* rams her way in to us."

With his own knife he fell to work in company with the men, ripping open the warm bodies before they could stiffen in the frost.

Since the harp was a hair seal and, unlike the Alaskan fur seal, was not taken for its fur-bearing qualities, there was no danger of harming the hides. They were roughly ripped off with the golden layer of fat or blubber three or four inches thick adhering to them and thrown upon the ice. The skinning operations went on wherever the bodies lay, and of necessity covered a wide area, and once the skinning was finished it became necessary to freight the hides to a central spot.

Accordingly each man made up what was called his tow, a heap of perhaps half a dozen skins lashed together. To the heap he attached the rope he had carried coiled on his shoulder and hauled his tow to the place chosen by Laurentide and Stavenger.

This point was just at the junction of the Labrador ice with the heavier Greenland floes. Here a ship could penetrate the easier, and here the twenty-two hundred pelts were panned in one big pan or pile. It was nearly noon when they finished, and there was no sign of the *Ulric*, but presently they heard the boom of dynamite charges echoing over the ice-fields.

"She's fast again!" deduced Laurentide, listening. "She may not get here for hours, and the men are hungry. So I guess we'd better walk back to her. Eh, Stavenger? And what about the pan? Think there's any danger of Savoyard's curs slinking back, making up tows and towing off to their ship?"

Stavenger shook his head.

"It ban too far too tow, and the ice skall be too rough. Lead off to the *Ulric*. Ay skall bring up the rear.

Stavenger remained only long enough to plant a red flag blazoned with the word *ULRIC* in white letters, to mark the pan and to shoulder a certain seal-pelt which he had tagged with a string. Then he followed the hungry line straggling home to dinner.

THE *Ulric* was having much trouble with the floes and was using dynamite lavishly as they came across the ice-field. A pause in the work and a gathering of the men aboard at the bulwarks told them they were sighted, and when they clambered up the ship's side they found Froude Boime leaning eagerly on the rail to greet them.

"What luck dids you have?" he demanded of Laurentide and Navista, who ascended first.

"Oh, Froude, over two thousand!" cried Navista.

"To be exact, twenty-two hundred skins," supplemented Laurentide proudly. "But we nearly had to fight for them. The *Ile d'Argent* had sighted the patch also, and Burgeo Savoyard was creeping up with one hundred of his crew."

"By th' glory fits! Dids you have a clash?"

"He tried to play the hypocrite to me, Froude," Navista declaimed before Laurentide could answer. "Then he tried to claim a share of the seals, but Ira ordered him back to his ship and finally had to knock him down for his crew to carry back."

"By the glory fits!" repeated Boime, which repetition for him was the very essence of imprecation. "Then we cans look out for him from this on. Burgeo Savoyard be not th' man to forget. He wills not forget th' *Ulric*, and he wills not forget you, Laurentide. But there be no use spoiling th' taste o' good fortune with such an ill flavor. We wills repair to th' chart-room to celebrate 't. I supposes you haves had th' men bring th' first seal killed, Navista?"

"First seal?"

Navista stared in surprise that changed to bewilderment at Laurentide's mischievous laughter.

"No, she hasn't," he declared in mock reproach. "But Fahlun Stavenger has. Fahlun killed it himself. So come along."

Navista, still bewildered, followed along with all the *Ulric's* officers, including the grinning Norwegian with the seal-pelt on his shoulder, which pelt was not relinquished till it was laid upon the chart-room table.

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With the company gathered round the table, Froude Boime cut off the end of the seal's tail with his knife and strung a piece of wire through the severed portion. Then he brought out a bottle of spirits and glasses from a locker and, having served a little to each member about the table, took up the tail tip by the wire.

"It's an old, old custom," whispered Laurentide to Navista. "Watch Boime and do the same as he does."

Boime gravely stirred the tail-tip in his glass and passed the wire on to Navista. Navista could not forbear to laugh as she did likewise and handed the tail-tip to Laurentide, from whom it went round the whole company to be finally tied up to the ceiling of the chart-room over Boime's head.

"That's an emblem of good luck for the rest of the voyage," Laurentide explained to Navista.

"Aye, Navista," nodded Boime, "I prefers to start on a whitecoat, but 't were not to be this time. So here's good luck to th' *Ulric!* Here's to a full catch and a safe voyage home!"

Heartily they drank the toast. Yet the toast seemed a futile one.

For, hours later, after butting their way in to the young ice where the kill had been made, they found not a single skin of their pan.

Only their broken-shafted flag marked the spot, and beyond they beheld a fresh, jagged-edged water lane where a sealer had rammed her way in from the eastern side of the floes.

It was patent who had done it. Since a seal skin was worth from one to three dollars in Colonial currency, the *Ile d'Argent* had at a stroke robbed the *Ulric* of anywhere from two thousand two hundred to six thousand six hundred dollars.

The *Ulric's* crew cried vengeance on Burgeo Savoyard and his men. Stavenger, retrieving his broken-shafted flag, stormed in a berserker rage. But Froude Boime without a word wheeled his ship and retraced his path out of the floes.

"I'm terribly disappointed that your first day on the floes was wasted," Navista told Laurentide, as she talked it over with him in his watch below that night.

"But it wasn't wasted, Navista," he assured her. "It wasn't wasted, because—I spent it with you!"

CHAPTER X

THE SHADOW-SHIP

THAT day was the first of many days which Laurentide did not count wasted, but which, in a material sense, in the stark tally of seal skins hoisted aboard, were fraught with misfortune. For from that day the *Ulric* was a marked ship. Singled out of the fleet by the enmity of Burgeo Savoyard, she became the victim of systematic theft.

Drifting floes they encountered in plenty, sighted many a good seal-herd and panned their kill, but the greater part of their pans they never saw again. Like a shadow-ship the *Ile d'Argent* always traveled somewhere abeam of them, pilfering as she went.

Men of the *Ulric* swore that she was not killing a seal of her own efforts, but simply derricking in those already killed. And so it seemed, for the *Ulric* never put crew on the ice that she did not lose many hundreds of skins. Sometimes large pans disappeared bodily. Sometimes, as if to divert suspicion, only a percentage of the skins in each pan was taken. But always in the plundering Captain Boime saw the cunning hand of Savoyard.

When storms were blowing and the pans naturally shifting about a good deal, they invariably vanished utterly, as if the gales had driven them far and wide upon the seas. Yet when it was calm so that the flags marking the pans could be discerned from a great distance, only so many skins were gone from each.

In a full week's hunting the *Ulric* killed, according to Fahlun Stavenger's tally, eight thousand four hundred and thirty-nine seals, but of these she had in her hold only two thousand seven hundred and five.

The *Ile d'Argent* had the rest. Not a member of the *Ulric's* crew held any doubt about it. Other ships were in the vicinity. They sighted them continually, for now they were up with the main body of the fleet which scoured the seas between Newfoundland's east coast and the Grand Banks, but the captains of these ships were known to Boime, and he would as soon have stolen a seal himself as harbored suspicion of them.

Moreover Laurentide and Stavenger, heading the hunting parties according to their custom, had sometimes met and spoken the crews of the other vessels on the

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floes, for upon good hunting days as many as two thousand men were spread upon the ice over an area of seventy-five or one hundred miles. These crews likewise complained of the loss of pans, though not on nearly so great a scale as the *Ulric's* loss, and Boime knew that when the *Ile d'Argent* lacked opportunity to rob Navista's ship, she was picking up isolated pans where she could do so without detection.

The indignation of the *Ulric's* men swelled momently, and, finding in Laurentide a kindred spirit, they entreated him to urge some sort of retaliatory action on their captain. But Laurentide, with his insight into Boime's nature, could not bring himself to make open protest till the day they lost nearly all of a valuable kill of whitecoats.

IT WAS the eighteenth of March, a dull, windy day with much loosely drifting ice about, and in the afternoon the *Ulric's* lookout had sighted the whitecoats scattered over a wide area. Dark and shifting fog had come down on the slaughter, and as fast as a pan was made it was marked with a torch instead of a flag, while the crew, taking paths where the floes were drifted together or jumping water lanes from cake to cake, went on to surround the next lot of whitecoats.

The seals were scattered in the general form of a crescent, and the crew finished their work near the place where they had begun and in sight of the *Ulric*, which was lying to, not daring to begin picking up the pans before the last one was made for fear of frightening the animals away.

When the men came aboard after dark, the ship steamed ahead on her cruise from torch to torch. The first torch marked a pile of two hundred skins which were duly hoisted in, and the *Ulric's* propeller throbbed slowly as she passed on to the next beacon bobbing up and down upon the swell.

"Empty floe, Cap'n!" yelled the second-mate Gembland who was on the amidships deck directing the hoisting of the derrick fixed to the mainmast.

At that moment Laurentide was coming on to the bridge to relieve Boime from his watch. He heard Gembland's call, and he turned an inquiring face to Boime in the light that shone through the wheelhouse windows.

"Savoyard once more, eh?" he gritted.

"I don'ts know," pondered Boime. "'T mights be that th' wind and swell haves tilted th' floe and slid th' pan off. Eh, Gembland—" calling to the second mate—"what does you think? Haves th' pan tilted off?"

"Not ez fur ez I kin jedge, sir," answered Gembland. "An' Stavenger sweers it's a strange floe, not the floe ez he panned on."

"Yes, it ban a strange floe, sir," corroborated the boatswain darkly, "for Ay ban put the torch on top of the pile. If the pile skall go, the torch go too."

"'T mights not, Stavenger," Boime pointed out. "'T mights possibly slip off and not go out. And you cans not be sure o' th' features o' a floe, they be all so much alike. So we wills reserve judgment till we sees th' others."

But the third and fourth and all the other torches likewise lighted empty floes, and the truth of the matter was forced home upon Boime.

"Aye, 't be Savoyard, as you says," he admitted to Laurentide. "He haves crept up in th' shifts o' th' fog, stolen our pans under our noses and set our torches adrift for us to chase like will-o'-wisps through th' night."

"And how long is this going on, Boime?" demanded Laurentide indignantly.

"I don'ts know," Boime muttered. "Maybe till he haves a full cotch and goes home to St. John's. I remembers well his boast th' morning we left. Him and me hads some words on th' dock along o' me shaking Navista's hand in good-by, and I remembers well his boast.

"He sneered at th' *Ulric*, and 'Bah!' he says, 'don'ts look for a cotch in that clumsy ironclad. She won't get enough skins and blubber to pay for her coal, and her crew wills come home with maybe five dollars each in their pockets as wage for six weeks' work.' That's what he says, Laurentide, and he says, too: 'It's only a proper sealing-ship like th' *Ile d'Argent* that can bring in th' seals. Burgeo Savoyard wills be first on th' Grand Banks floes, and Burgeo Savoyard wills be first back to St. John's. "It's th' *Florizel's* record o' forty-nine thousand eight hundred and ninety-three skins made in nineteen-ten that I be after,' he shouts, naming the skins to impress and swearing by the bones of the devil to beat 't. 'And when you sees me sail in with a one-hundred-thousand-dollar cotch,' he says, 'and th' *Ulric* with empty holds, you, Froude

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Boime, wills change your tune, and you, Navista Clode, wills condescend to take my hand.' "

"Curse his near-pirate's heart!" exploded Laurentide. "Does he think he can buy her?"

"What else? Drive her down to poverty and worse, to debt, and then buy her with th' price he taked out o' her own ship's hold. 'T be his estimate o' her spirit, for th' only measure he haves to measure 't by be his own craven soul. And her th' daughter o' a man who felled to his murdering knife. By th' glory fits, Laurentide, when 't comes to God's judging-time, He be going to judge Burgeo Savoyard wonderful hard!"

"But, man, are you going to leave everything to Providence?" Laurentide burst out harshly.

"What woulds you have me do?" demanded Boime quickly. "Quit th' hunting till th' *Ile d'Argent's* men haves to go on th' floes and then steal their pans as they stoled ours? Be 't a thief like th' Pierrais you woulds have me be?"

"No, certainly not! But the skins of ours he has are ours by right, and we do no wrong if we recover them. Why can't we hunt him out, run him down and take them? We have a few knots on the *Ile d'Argent* in speed, and I can't understand why you don't try it."

"I wills tell you why," proffered Boime bluntly. "Because I don'ts want to start wholesale murder on th' high seas. I knows Burgeo Savoyard. I tells you I haves knowed him for a long time. If th' *Ulric's* men tried to board his vessel to take back th' skins, there woulds be wholesale murder on th' spot. For, as on our own and all th' other ships, there be rifles aboard th' *Ile d'Argent* for killing th' old harps and th' hood seals and th' square flippers. Burgeo Savoyard woulds be quick to use them."

"Then there's nothing for us to do but suffer his raids?"

"I guesses not. If th' *Ile d'Argent* coulds be boarded without bloodshed I woulds do 't. I be a God-fearing man, Laurentide, but for Navista's sake I woulds countenance taking th' law into our own hands and clubbing a few heads if 't coulds be done without mortal hurt. But there be no use talking o' 't. 'T coulds not be done. Th' only thing as wills ever run him down and board him be a British cruiser. So we cans but suffer, try to get as many seals as we cans without his knowledge and set our larger hopes on th' Main Patch."

Laurentide nodded understandingly, and for an instant there rose before his eyes the vision of the Main Patch as he had seen it in sundry lucky years, the great community of seals that congregated every spring on the edge of the main arctic floes. The herds they had already encountered and the floes they had already combated were but scatterings to what the Main Patch would be, and Laurentide knew it was the ambition of every sealing captain who sailed from port to strike the great prize.

"But it's no easy thing to strike," he reminded Boime. "It takes experience, judgment and, some say, luck!"

"Aye, 't do that. Where haves you generally found 't yourself?"

"One year as far south as the Grand Banks," Laurentide told him. "All the other years well to the northward."

"So 't haves been with Captain Clode and me," nodded Boime. "Generally we haves found 't in th' latitude o' Belle Isle Strait."

"If we could strike it this time we could fill up on it all right. The *Ulric* has the crew to do it."

"Aye, she haves that, and I thinks 't be th' only chance left for us. I be going to look at our log in th' chart-room, Laurentide, and figure along o' th' currents, winds and tides, th' set and condition o' th' ice and th' size and character o' th' seal herds we haves already met. I be going to weigh those things before I turns in, and to-morrow we wills put our heads together over th' sum and if th' signs be right we cans bear away to th' northward for th' Main Patch."

Pondering upon the man and his code, Laurentide watched him walk heavily across to the chart-room door.

At the door Boime looked back.

"So, good night, Laurentide. Gembland wills relieve you, but if anything unusual do turn up, call me also."

"Good night, Boime," returned Laurentide. "I guess you'll sleep through. It looks like a quiet night."

CHAPTER XI

IN THE NIGHT WATCH

THE chart-room door closed, and Laurentide turned to his pacing of the bridge. But he had taken hardly half a dozen steps when he heard soft feet upon the

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bridge platform, and wheeled to see Navista crossing the belt of light from the wheelhouse windows.

"Well," he greeted with a lightness he did not feel, "have you come to share a lonely watch with me?"

"For a few minutes," she smiled. "I had no idea it was so late. I fell into a doze over the book I was reading after supper, and when I awoke I could hardly believe it was so near midnight. I thought I would come on deck and see how the work was going on. I suppose it's finished?"

She pointed to the starboard rail of the afterdeck where, a short distance from the bridge, men under Stavenger were swinging in the davits the boat that had been used to explore the floes.

"Finished," nodded Laurentide grimly, "but another ship did the finishing. All we got out of that kill of whitecoats was the two hundred skins in the first pan."

Navista gave an exclamation of dismay. In her disappointment, a disappointment not merely personal, but embodying the welfare of all her crew, her face assumed a pathetic expression, and Laurentide's resentment against Burgeo Savoyard flared in a dynamic outburst of righteous anger.

"Savoyard's the most despicable coward I've ever come across!" he declaimed before Navista could open her lips to speak. "I never thought to see a man so mean. It's not the bold-faced robbery that incenses me so—although that's bad enough. It's the motive behind it—insult and impoverishment to you."

"You know how he hates me?" she asked, her nerves all tingling at his outburst. "You know? And why?"

"Yes, I know that he does hate you, and I know why. I guessed as much from the first sign of trouble with him, and Boime told me enough to confirm my suspicions. Navista, I—I simply can't stand by and see this go on. Boime says there's nothing to do but suffer and set our hopes on the Main Patch. He says there's no way of getting satisfaction out of the Pierrais, but I revolt at helping to fill the *Ile d'Argent's* holds and thus aid Savoyard in working out his revenge."

"Then what do you propose to do? What else can we do?" demanded Navista with a gesture of desperation. "I think Froude's right. There seems to be no gain in hunting the scattered herds only to swell the *Ile d'Argent's* tally of skins. We may as well stake everything on finding the Main Patch, take what seals come in our way and keep on our course till we meet it."

"But if we miss it?" groaned Laurentide.

"We go home with an empty ship," concluded Navista.

She spoke firmly, fatalistically, but in spite of her fatalism, Laurentide detected a quiver on her curving, sensitive lips, a suspicious dimness in her eyes, and his heart went out to her even as it had done the day he stood by her side and helped commit her father's body to the deep. Without measuring the significance of what he was doing, and doing it before he was aware that his feelings were prompting him to any physical move, he reached out his arms and drew her out of the belt of light into the semi-darkness of the bridge.

"But, listen, Navista," he spoke tensely, "if we strike the Main Patch, all right! If we don't, I want you to let me take a hand. I want you to let me stand the *Ulric's* loss. It's nothing to me—the money, I mean. I've more cursed money than I know what to do with. It all came from the sea, and it seems fitting that it should help the men of the sea. That's why anybody aboard could take any of it without sacrificing his pride. They've as much right to it as I have—more right, when you come to analyze the thing, because they've done years and years of hard work without reward.

"So if we fail in finding the Main Patch you'll have to let me reimburse every man according to his rating with what a good catch would bring. You'll have to let me lift the *Ulric's* debt, and give you the owner's share with a cleared ship."

"No, no, Ira," refused Navista, her body suddenly becoming rigid, and drawing away from his grip. "Don't you know me better than that? For four hundred years my people have lived in the Colony as a free people, and taken dole from no man. Do you imagine I'm going to start now? Not a cent of the *Ulric's* debt shall you lift. And as for the men aboard, you couldn't offer them a deeper insult.

"Ira, I know what I'm talking about. You haven't lived as one of the Terra Novans all your life. You don't yet fully understand their codes and customs. In misfortune they share their bread with each other, but they would take no charity from an alien."

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"Alien!" echoed Laurentide with a bitter feeling of exclusion from her and hers that smote him like some intangible dread.

"Oh, forgive me, Ira, forgive me!" she begged impetuously, her pleading hands fastening upon the arms from which her pride had wrenched her. "I spoke figuratively. By 'alien' I meant nothing more than outsider, one not born on the island. You have begun to enter into our lives here on the *Ulric* and to understand us, and I speak so that you will not begin to misunderstand us. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," Laurentide answered slowly, "and I am not hurt—although I was afraid I was going to be. I understand, and I honor your pride and the pride of your men which will accept nothing but the fighting of a good fight in the face of Savoyard's depredations and an abiding by the outcome of that fight. And, by heavens, Navista—" as he pounded the bridge rail with his clenched fist—"it's going to be a hard struggle before he can call us beaten!"

How hard a struggle Laurentide dared tell only himself in his secret heart! For Navista's proud refusal of his offer had checked him on the verge of speaking more.

He realized that what he longed to tell her could never be told if they lost the fight with Savoyard and failed in the quest of the main seal herd. He knew what he longed to tell her her pride would never let her hear if the *Ulric* sailed back to St. John's with a well nigh-empty hold.

"And Savoyard, poor fool," he mused aloud, looking off across the dark, ice-flecked sea, heaving under the shifting fog as if he were addressing the Pierrais somewhere in the gloom, "Savoyard——"

"Savoyard, what?" prompted Navista in his pause.

"Savoyard, poor fool, fancies he can——"

"No, no, don't say it," she interrupted. "I'm a little superstitious, you see, and it might bring me bad luck!"

She gave a little shiver and turned to stare with him between the cañons of the fog banks, and in that moment of the night-watch Laurentide felt very close to her.

All was quiet aboard except for the movements of the boatswain and his men as they finished hoisting the boat. There was no light in the chart-room. Boime had completed his survey of the log, figured his future course and gone to sleep.

Laurentide and Navista were alone with the tossing sea, the gliding fog, and their own selves. For it is in the night watches, beyond any other moment on the sea, that the true self reveals itself, draws aloof from the body and slips the fetters of the mind.

There seemed no shadow of earth between them in that instant. They communed in space, as it were, spirit with spirit, and sounded the depths of each other's souls. Then, striking in across their detachment from material things, came a well-known tapping noise.

"Reef points," whispered Laurentide only half believingly.

"But it can't be," Navista whispered back. "A sailing-vessel couldn't live in the ice we've been through the last few days, and besides, we must be too far offshore for the Labrador schooners. Whereabouts are we now, do you think?"

"Very near forty-eight north, fifty west!"

"Then it's no schooner."

"Maybe it was the lapping of the water against the floes. No—there it goes again. Listen closely!"

The boatswain and his crew had also caught the noise, and in the hush of the listening, the Norwegian's call, softened from his habitual bull-throated bellow to a gentle croak, was wafted up to the bridge.

"There ban sailing-ship off on our port quarter, sir!"

"So I thought, Stavenger," replied Laurentide tensely. "And there shouldn't, by any law of navigation, be a sailing-vessel hereabouts. If it isn't a sailing-vessel, it must be a steam-vessel using her extra sails. There's only one ship in the fleet that would be using sails tonight, and that's the *Ile d'Argent.*"

"By ——, sir, ——"

"There's a lady on the bridge, Stavenger."

"Hah! Ay ban beg pardon, Miss Navista. But that Savoyard he ban clap on sails to creep up so he skall steal our pans. I ban wondered much we hear no engines work, and the fog she carry sounds so well."

"That was the mystery to Boime and me, but maybe the Pierrais's very trickery will be his undoing yet. I wonder if the lookout can make him out?"

"Ay tank not, sir. The crow's-nest ban high above the fog. The mist ban float low tonight. Ay skall sooner try to sight him with boat if you ban give permission. His sails work him into the floes, but Ay tank

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it ban take steam to work him out again. He must ban lie to some place near in the fog so not to start his engines till we ban out of hearing by morning. You skall let me hunt him with boat?"

"Well, you'd better use the boat then, Stavenger. Lower away, but be cautious if you near him. We don't want him to learn any one's trying to locate him."

Laurentide rang the engine-room telegraph for "stop," and the *Ulric* lost way.

Swiftly Stavenger and his crew lowered their boat from its davits again, cast off, and vanished in a gliding pall of mist.

"Are you going to wake Froude, Ira?" asked Navista.

"Not yet," Laurentide answered. "There's no reason for waking him. We'll see first what Stavenger finds."

CHAPTER XII

MIDNIGHT MUTINY

FOR half an hour they waited, speculating eagerly on what might be the outcome of Stavenger's search, and exchanging their speculations in low tones upon the bridge. The rest of the ship was now deserted. With the exception of the boatswain's crew all the men had turned in in their quarters below.

High on the mainmast above the stratum of fog the lookout poised in a sphere seemingly far removed. Boime slept on in the chart-room, and the wheelsman, invisible within the closed wheelhouse, waited to give or take the spokes of his little brass steering-wheel when the *Ulric* should swing forward on her course.

The wheelsman had no means of knowing the reason for the vessel's pause. Doubtless he would attribute it to obstructing ice, or, if the sound of the lowered boat had reached him, to the sighting of another torch-marked pan, and Laurentide could imagine him leaning lethargically upon the gear casing and perhaps yawning while he waited.

Laurentide could imagine, too, the engine-room staff reasoning like the wheelsman, and waiting as the wheelsman waited, with the chief engineer slouching on the guard-rail which protected the starting and stopping gear, ready to send the quiver of motion through the sealer's steel fibers.

Of all aboard, he and Navista alone remained alert, tense, expectant for the confirmation of their suspicions that the *Ile d'Argent* was close at hand. And that knowledge that they alone were sharing a secret that might have vital importance fused more firmly the communion of spirit that the night-watch had awakened in them. With mutual accord they drew close to each other on the bridge, and Laurentide's hand sought hers where it clasped the rail.

"I hope to high heaven it's Savoyard," he breathed. "And if it is, we'll take back our skins."

"Ira!" she exclaimed, startled, yet with a delicious thrill at his audacity and determination. "But will Froude——"

"Froude won't know anything about it till it's too late to turn back. It's our chance, a chance that's Providence-sent, if you like, and we'd be aiding and abetting the Pierrais in his thieving if we didn't take it. That is, if it's he—and I believe it is. Who else—but listen! Isn't that the boat coming back?"

They were silent, pitched at the height of suspense, when off on the heaving swell they saw the dark loom of a boat tossed up to the level of the bridge. It went down in the trough and up again and continued to rise and fall, working momentarily nearer till it slid under the *Ulric's* hull.

Its crew swarmed up the dangling falls, and leaving his men to hoist the craft, the boatswain made a bull-like charge across the afterdeck to the bridge.

"Carefully, Stavenger, carefully!" cautioned Laurentide. "And speak low. Is it the *Ile d'Argent?*"

"Aye, it ban that tam Savoyard, sir. Hah! Ay ban beg pardon, Miss Navista! Ay forget, and Ay skall mean that dog of a Pierrais!"

"Where is he?" cried Navista, hardly hearing in her excitement Stavenger's emphatic words or his apology therefor.

The huge Norwegian extended a massive arm due north, pointing with grave precision into the fog.

"There ban big island of ice off on our port quarter. Ay ban see her when we hunt the floes for our pans. She ban only mile or so away, and maybe half-mile across. The *Ile d'Argent* ban lie to on her shore. We ban hear the sails flap plain over there, and Ay ban land and climb up over the ice peaks to find out. Yes, it ban the *Ile d'Argent.* Ay

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creep close, and Ay ban hear Savoyard curse the floes that hold him there."

"Any chance of his getting out with the sails before morning?" demanded Laurentide feverishly.

"Ay tank not, sir. The ice ban make pack all around. The Pierrais know the *Ulric* ban somewhere near. He hear her engines, and that skall make him uneasy. He ban like start his own and get out, but he afraid we chase and run him down for his robbery. Ay hear him ask his men if the *Ulric* ban got a searchlight."

"By Jove, Stavenger, I wish we had one! But if the floes hold till dawn—and dawn's not many hours away now—we'll get along without it."

"You skall chase him down?" howled the boatswain in exultation.

"Hush, Stavenger! Keep your voice low. If you wake Captain Boime you'll lose whatever likelihood there is of running him down. So don't yell, but go quietly and arouse the second mate, Gembland. Tell him I want all hands here upon the amidships deck. Summon them instantly, but remember, they must gather without noise."

"What are you going to do, Ira?" Navista burst out, all a-tremble with suppressed eagerness not unmixed with anxiety. "I would like to see a thief stripped of his plunder, and I would love nothing better than to beat Burgeo Savoyard at his own game. But recollect what sort of man he is, what sort of crew he has. You know you can't board him openly without bloodshed and slaughter."

"I know," laughed Laurentide grimly, "but if the men are of one mind we'll board him, all the same. I hope to cut out any slaughter. You'll hear how in a moment. Here are the first-comers on deck, so let us go down. I want to speak to them from the steps of the bridge ladder."

While they descended to the lowest step of the bridge ladder, the last of the crew were tumbling swiftly on deck, and quietly massing in a compact crowd before them. Stavenger's announcement that the *Ile d'Argent* was close at hand, and that a raid upon her was contemplated, had run like a plague through the ranks of the *Ulric's* men. The throng buzzed with low, excited murmurs, like the undertone of many hives of bees, and the men craned their necks forward, hands upon each other's backs and shoulders, to hear what Laurentide might propose.

"Oh, Ira, be careful!" admonished Navista fearfully, pressing his arm. "Their blood's up. They've been brooding on their misfortune, and they're ready for anything in order to be revenged on Savoyard. Be wise and sane. Don't rush them blindly into trouble."

"I won't," assured Laurentide. "It's their own choice. I'll do nothing arbitrary. See here, men—" pitching his voice so that it carried distinctly to the outer ranks, yet did not resound too loudly in the clammy void of the night—"you know from Stavenger what's afoot, and I'll not waste time explaining that part. What I'm thinking of doing is a little out of the orthodox, and I want to know if you're with me in it. Are you willing to stand behind me in anything I try?"

"Aye, that we be, sir," they growled seemingly as a man.

"Good," nodded Laurentide. "I don't think there's a dissenting voice, but we have to make sure. Gembland—" addressing the second mate, who with the boatswain, stood directly in front of him—"is there a man here who doesn't want to back me, who doesn't want to back Navista Clode in wresting his own and her own from that near-pirate, Savoyard? If there is, let him go down to his cabin and take no part."

The second mate twisted his head slowly about the packed semicircle of men, but not a member of the crew dissented.

"I cal'late ye kin caount on 'em all, sir," he concluded.

"Aye, if we skall have to fight to death, sir," supplemented Stavenger pugnaciously.

"We don't want to do that, Stavenger," Laurentide pointed out. "By coming to blows we'd lose more than we'd gain. Savoyard has met us with trickery. We'll meet him with trickery. He's assiduously cleaned out our pans so far. We'll give him one more to clean out."

"Haow d'ye mean, sir?" asked Gembland uncomprehendingly.

"How many skins has the *Ulric* in her hold?" demanded Laurentide.

"With the whitecoats ez we got tonight, two thousand, nine hundred and five, sir!"

"That'll make a splendid pan. You understand? I'm going to set a trap for

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Savoyard. He can't refuse that bait—the sight of a pan of nearly three thousand skins, with the *Ulric's* flag on top, floating through the fog at dawn. When he lands his men on the floes to clean out the pan we'll have the opportunity we've been looking for."

Entirely forgetting themselves, the *Ulric's* men gave vent to a roar of approbation, but Laurentide's upraised hand choked it off like a muffled roll of thunder.

"Don't wake Boime," he warned. "And don't yell till you're going over the *Ile d'Argent's* rail."

"But see, see, Ira," broke in Navista impetuously, "you'll never get aboard without manslaughter even if a great many of his men are on the ice. He'll have some left to attend to the hoisting and to work the ship, and they'll shoot down any of the *Ulric's* crew who try to come aboard."

"Yes, men of the *Ulric's* crew," chuckled Laurentide. "But Savoyard won't recognize them as the *Ulric's* crew when he's boarded. Boime said the only thing that could board him safely would be a British cruiser, and a British cruiser the *Ulric* shall be before the night's two hours older. It's only a matter of paint, canvas and poles."

"By haall, sir," exploded Stavenger, "we skall be British cruiser, eh? Hah!—now we ban understand."

"Then get right down to business," ordered Laurentide. "Gembland will take charge of the bridge. I'm going to direct the men in their operations. We have our work cut out for us, every one here—even you, Navista, for you'll have to find something below out of which to snip rough uniforms for a boatload of marines. With the help of the shifting fog we'll make the *Ulric* the splendid semblance of a cruiser in the break of day."

"But it's mutiny, Ira," gasped Navista, the life-long respect for discipline which she had learned from her father wrestling with her mighty desire to embark on Laurentide's daring enterprise. "Froude Boime's asleep, and doesn't know a thing we're doing. It's nothing short of mutiny, I say."

"Yes, stark midnight mutiny," laughed Laurentide, "but in a good cause. Come on, and be one of the mutineers!"

Catching her by the hand he dragged her, half-laughing, half-protesting, off the bridge ladder into the buzzing crowd of men upon the amidships deck.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ARMING OF THE ULRIC

THE HOURS that lay between midnight and the dawn were hours filled with strenuous labor. Told off into sections to do this or that part of the work, the *Ulric's* crew toiled in a feverish orgasm upon the transformation of the sealer, and magically her evolution took place under their skilful hands.

Two false funnels of canvas rose up from the afterdeck behind her single smokestack. False turrets of canvas rimmed round her after- and main-masts. Like the black muzzles of guns the butts of the long poles used for ice work poked through the turrets, while more poles and the heavy derrick beams of the hoisting-gear grinned ominously out of slits in the canvas gun shields planted round her rail.

As far as possible the work went on in silence. Some clatter of the material the men were handling was inevitable, but even if this reached the *Ile d'Argent* a mile and one-half away on the other side of the ice island, Laurentide had little fear of Savoyard's taking alarm. The sealer had been banging half the night about the floes already, and any additional clamor would be construed as a continuance of their search for their pans.

Besides, if the Pierrais should suddenly take alarm and chance getting away with his engines without being detected, he would but hasten the moment for action, for, dawn or no dawn, Laurentide was determined to run him down. If he could not lure Savoyard into dropping the majority of his men upon the floes, he was prepared to board him in the face of his full crew's strength.

But as the work on the *Ulric* neared completion and dawn approached with no sound from the direction where the *Ile d'Argent* lay, Laurentide felt a thrill of satisfaction that his plan was working out along its original lines.

There remained only to put the finishing touches upon the cruiser, make up the pan of sealskins for the bait and uniform a boat's crew as naval men for the boarding. The finishing touches consisted of darkening the *Ulric's* bright spots.

Paint which Laurentide had hoped to find in the lockers was very scarce, so a

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substitute of coal dust from the bunkers, mixed with water, was used, and with this thick grime such conspicuous parts as the glaring letters of her name, her funnel with its crossband and diagonal stripes and the shafts and cowls of the ventilators, were rendered neutral.

When this was done to Laurentide's satisfaction, he rushed below to see what progress Navista had made in the search for material for uniforms.

He met her coming up the companionway with her arms full of rumpled cloth.

"I've overhauled everything," she cried out at sight of him, "and the only thing I could find to answer was the curtain draperies in the officers' cabins. I've brought all there was, though it's not really blue. See! Do you think it will do?"

"It's more green than blue," decided Laurentide, inspecting it under the electrics, "but that won't be noticed in the fog. All we want is a glint of color. Here, give it to me. I'll carry it on deck. Have you a pair of scissors with you?"

"Yes," she answered, following him up the stairs, "and needle and twine, though it will necessarily be pretty rough sewing in the short time we have."

"We won't sew," he told her. "We'll make ponchos—that's a square like a blanket with a hole in the center to admit a man's head. They cling like a cape, and they'll look at a distance enough like the blouses of British Navy bluejackets. There's no need to bother with trousers, for the crew will be sitting in the boat. You cut, Navista. Guess them out roughly a yard square."

While Navista snipped the draperies into ponchos, Laurentide marshaled Stavenger and the boat's crew the Norwegian had used to locate the *Ile d'Argent* and gave them the capes to draw on over their heads.

"They might fit worse," he chuckled, "and Savoyard won't have any chance to go into details. The sudden illusion is what we want. Stavenger, serve out the sealing rifles and ammunition. I hope there'll be no use for the latter, but it wouldn't do to get into a tight place without it. Be quick about it and man your boat aft there ready to lower away. By the time you're ready the rest of the crew will have the pan of skins made. And morning's not very far away now."

Hurriedly Laurentide drew Navista on to the bridge again, releasing Gembland to look after the making of the pan.

"Rope a wind-blown floe, Gembland," he ordered, "and pass the skins by hand. When I give you the word, cast loose."

DAWN was on the verge of breaking. Between the shifts of the fog a cold gray light filtered down upon the black ocean swell. On both quarters the ghostly gleam of solitary floes flashed and disappeared, and off to the northward the peaks of the ice island which hid the *Ile d'Argent* at times lifted into view.

The wind blew from the south, besetting the *Ulric* with a pack of loose floes extending to the ice island's windward shore, but the breeze had no effect upon the huger mass of ice. The current propelled it against the wind, and on the leeward shore, surrounded by more loosely-floating floes amid which she could not use sails to any advantage, Laurentide knew Savoyard's ship drifted along in the island's wake.

Thus had both ships moved since midnight, steadily bearing south, although neither had started a piston-rod. And the anomaly of their motion was that although they went south embedded in the island's heavy ice, the lighter floes to the east and west, their shallow draught exempting them from the current's influence, were going north before the wind.

It was one of these floes going north on the edge of their own ice-pack that Gembland roped and upon its surface prepared to make his pan.

More than two hundred of the crew went over the *Ulric's* side and, forming a line upon the causeway of the cakes, quietly passed the sealskins from hand to hand as quickly as they were received from the sealer's hold.

When all were piled in one large heap in the middle of the captive floe, Gembland planted his flag on top, and at its first flutter Laurentide waved him the signal to cast off and get his men aboard.

The weight of nearly three thousand skins gave the floe deeper draught, but the increased surface the big heap offered to the wind counteracted that, and the floe still went north. Plainly marked with a larger flag than any of the *Ulric's* pennants Savoyard had yet sighted, a greater pan than any of the *Ulric's* he had yet stolen, the floe with its tempting bait blew slowly

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along the eastern point of the ice island.

All aboard strained their eyes after it, conscious that the critical moment was at hand. Gembland and his two hundred-odd who had planted the pan, eagerly waiting and panting from their exertions, blackened the amidships deck. Twisting their heads to see, Stavenger's crew with their near-blue ponchos and rifles across their shoulders, sat like bluejackets in the boat that hung from its davits ready to lower away. While to Laurentide and Navista upon the bridge the fate of their very souls might have hung upon the progress of the pan, so intently they watched its course.

"Listen for his boats being lowered away!" urged Laurentide. "The main point is how many boat crews will he drop?"

"All he has," prophesied Navista. "It's policy for him to clean out the pan as swiftly as possible. Look—the floe's rounding the point at last. Listen now, Ira. We're very close to action."

Palms cupped about their ears to intensify any sound that might echo in the moist air, they stood gazing fixedly upon the disappearing floe, but just before it disappeared a harsh scringing sound grated behind them, and they both whirled to see Boime stepping out from the chart-room doorway.

Boime's eyes were heavy, and he appeared to be only half awake as he swept the funnels, turrets, guns and the boatload of British Navy bluejackets with a somnolent stare.

"Be th' *Ulric* sunk and haves I been lying a stunned man through 't all?" he blurted. "And what cruiser be this?"

"Oh, Froude, the disguise must be good!" cried Navista, leaping frantically toward him. "And don't you say a word. Don't you dare spoil things now. We discovered the position of Burgeo Savoyard's ship behind yonder island of ice, and we set a trap for him. See that pan floating round the point? It's the skins from our hold, and when he drops his boat crews to get them it's Ira's plan to swoop down on him as a British cruiser."

A slow grin displaced Boime's vacant expression, for though somewhat lethargic in imagination he had a sense of humor, and the grin told Navista that for their crime as ringleaders of a midnight mutiny there would be no expiation in irons.

"You said you'd board him, Boime, if it could be done without mortal combat," reminded Laurentide. "Here's your chance. Now that you're awake you had better take command."

"No, no, Laurentide," refused Boime, too generous to intrude at the final moment. "I be not th' man to reap th' gain o' another's efforts and call th' glory mine. Work out your plan in your own way. You be still in charge. And by the glory fits—" rubbing his eyes to stare more clearly at the *Ulric's* grim armament—"if you forces him to disgorge his plunder with a little weather-grayed canvas, two dummy funnels and th' ends o' a few poles, St. John's wills never laugh th' last o' 't."

"Then quick, Ira, quick!" besought Navista, whose eyes had never left the fluttering flag which marked their pan. "It's gone, and there go his boats with a run. Listen—one, two, three, four, five, six—all of them! I told you that. Quick! Near-pirate as he is, you have him now!"

Sweeping the ship with a swift calculating glance as he jumped to the engine-room telegraph stand, Laurentide called out an order to the second mate.

"Gembland, take charge of the signal halyard!" he commanded.

Then he rang for full speed ahead, and the *Ulric* bore round the island point in the wake of her vanished pan.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAPTURE OF THE "ILE D'ARGENT"

THE moment they rounded the point, Savoyard's bellowing shout aboard the *Ile d'Argent* told them that they were sighted. Through the shifts of the fog they could see him rushing about on the bridge and shouting for his crews to come back.

His boats were several hundred yards away from the sealer, one with its crew already landed upon the *Ulric's* floating pan, the others working in close to the edge of the floe and about to land.

At their captain's call those who had landed tumbled rapidly back into their craft and all the boats pulled desperately for their ship. But, hurtling through the semi-veil of the mist, a black, three-funneled, turreted cruiser, flying the British ensign at her foretop, cut in between them and their goal.

Savoyard's baffled curses rolled over the

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waves to them as the *Ile d'Argent* turned tail and commenced to run before her.

It was patent to every one aboard the pseudo-cruiser that the Pierrais was caught off his guard. The slowness with which the sealer got under way showed that while he had frittered with sails his engineers had carelessly let the steam go down. His boat falls were still dangling low to the water. The trysails themselves had not been rolled back in the extra gaskets. They impeded his flight, and before the men he sent aloft to take them in had finished their task, Laurentide had contrived to wear the *Ulric* wide abeam of him, as a battle-ship maneuvers for a broadside target, and to head across his bows.

On account of the pack of floes cluttering the ice island's shore, Savoyard could not alter his course so as to put the pursuing vessel astern, and, rushing at a greater speed at an angle to the *Ile d'Argent's* line of flight, Lautentide waved his hand to the second-mate Gembland in charge of the signal halyard.

"Lie to!" was the signal that ran up and broke on the wind at the *Ulric's* masthead.

But the only answer from the *Ile d'Argent* was an increased burst of speed, and the black smoke streaming horizontally from her funnel told that the stokers in her stokehold were shoveling in a frenzy.

"He wills get away yet!" howled Boime, staring fascinated from the *Ulric's* bridge. "He haves th' nerve to take any risk. How cans you stop him when your guns wills not shoot?"

"They will shoot," declared Laurentide. "Gembland, get into that forward turret with your dynamite. When the signal pennant flutters, light your fuse and throw. Plant it well aboard, but be careful not to hit any one."

The second-mate sprang forward with a rush. One of the crew took over charge of the signal halyard, and meanwhile the two ships tore on across the seas. Dense smoke vaguely wreathing them, they plowed great white furrows in the dark swell, speeding a full sixteen knots and splintering to atoms on their ponderous prows any floes that crossed their path.

The *Ile d'Argent's* boats were now two or three miles astern. The *Ulric* was close upon her, suddenly slowing speed as she began to cut fairly across her bows. But Savoyard refused to heed the signal. Instead of complying, he racked the *Ile d'Argent's* engines for a final surge of speed with the evident intention of recklessly ramming the vessel in his way.

"Lie to! Lie to!" the signal pennant seemed to cry audibly, as at Laurentide's direction it leaped into a frantic, jerking motion.

And instantly, while the *Ulric* came about, with the *Ile d'Argent* only one hundred feet away on her port bow, there flared the gleam of Gembland's match in the false forward turret, and his stick of dynamite hit the *Ile d'Argent's* afterdeck just behind the bridge. There came a crash like the explosion of a four-inch shell. The fragments of a hatch flew skyward, and a hole five feet long gaped in the sealer's funnel.

"Lay to or we'll sink you!" roared Laurentide, crouching with Navista and Boime from Savoyard's sight behind the weather cloth.

The Pierrais wavered. The *Ulric's* signal jerked once more. Another missile from the forward turret hit the *Ile d'Argent's* mainmast with a rain of splinters, and Savoyard, with curses that rained like the splinters, reluctantly lay to.

BEFORE either vessel had ceased gliding, Stavenger's boat had hit the water and was hooking on to the *Ile d'Argent's* dangling falls, and not until Savoyard beheld the great blond Norwegian boatswain climb over the rail and rush up the bridge-ladder at the head of his pseudo-bluejackets did he realize that he had been tricked.

The fog was thinning every moment in the freshening breeze, and the daylight striking through revealed to him the *Ulric's* masquerade.

"Pirates! by the bones of *le diable*, pirates!" he bellowed in a choking rage, shaking his fist in the boatswain's face. "I'll see you jailed in St. John's for this!"

"Ban jail yourself!" retorted Stavenger. "You skall call up all hands aboard this minute."

"*Mon Dieu*, I'll see you in——"

Stavenger's sealing rifle, jammed into the pit of Savoyard's stomach, interrupted.

"You skall call or Ay ban drill you through!" he threatened.

Under the prod of the Norwegian's weapon Savoyard yielded and summoned his wheelsman, engine-room staff and the

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others below to line up with the few he had kept on deck under the twenty-five rifles of Stavenger's boat crew.

"Now any man who skall make trouble get drilled too," Stavenger warned them.

"Yes, ye smugglin', thievin' sons o' St. Pierre," supplemented the voice of Gembland from the false forward turret which loomed high over the *Ile d'Argent's* bridge, "ef ye make a false move I'll blaow yer old scaow to flinders!"

Grinning down at them, he puffed hard at a glowing pipe and showed them a stick of dynamite with fuse attached ready in his hand.

"*Par Dieu*, then," snarled Savoyard, "what do you mean to do—rob us?"

"By ——, sir," laughed Stavenger, looking across the narrow water gap to Laurentide and the others upon the *Ulric's* bridge, "he ban ask what we mean do?"

"Stand by to take the line, Stavenger," smiled Laurentide grimly.

A light line with a heavy hawser attached was cast from the *Ulric's* deck to the *Ile d'Argent's* deck, and the hawser was passed across.

"Stavenger, how many skins of ours has the *Ile d'Argent* in her hold?" Laurentide asked when the hawser was made fast.

"Five thousand seven hundred and thirty-four before we ban make yesterday's kill, sir," announced the boatswain, consulting his tally book, "and twenty-seven hundred yesterday skall make eight thousand four hundred and thirty-four."

"How many of them whitecoats?"

"Five thousand, seven hundred, sir. All the rest ban old harps."

"Then go ahead and do your work. Take up the hawser till our derrick booms can reach his hatches. And you, men—" waving a hand that galvanized all the waiting crew of the *Ulric* into action— "clear away this raffle of canvas and poles and get the hoisting gear back into working order."

"*Ciel*, Froude Boime!" raged Savoyard, gesticulating wildly as the two vessels rode rail to rail. "Why are you hiding there behind the weather cloth and what play of *le diable* are you letting this cursed Yankee go on with?"

"You wills have to ask him, Savoyard," returned Boime, the grin which had never left his face since he first surveyed the sealer's transformation deepening into a cavernous laugh. "'T were his watch above, and he be in charge o' everything. I myself haves hardly shaked off th' drowsiness o' sleep."

"Are you mad, you cursed Yankee," yelled the Pierrais, turning his wrath upon Laurentide, "that you think to take seal skins out of my very hold and escape the penalty of the law?"

But Laurentide, shouting directions to the crew in dismantling the *Ulric's* armament was too busy to pay him any attention, and it was Navista, suddenly exposing her triumphant face from behind the weather cloth who upset his hypocritical pose.

"*Par Dieu*, I might have known you were in it," he cried at sight of her, "for of all the deviltry that takes place upon the Seven Seas a woman is at the unfathomed bottom of most of it. Now I understand. It is for you the cursed Yankee has worked this ruse. For though Boime has as much desire, Boime has not the wit to plan the daring things that win a woman's heart."

"That wills do o' that talk," called Boime sternly. "You shalls not bandy Navista's name among men."

"*Mon Dieu*, will it do?" spat the Pierrais. "She is so high and sacred, eh, that I can not speak her name among men? And here she wantonly sails the seas with a whole shipload of men!"

"Staven—" exploded Boime harshly.

But he did not need to finish his shout, for even while Savoyard spoke, the boatswain leaped toward him across eight feet of the *Ile d'Argent's* deck.

"By ——, you skall not speak so of the daughter of Captain Clode!" he yelled in his Berserker rage.

His maul-like fist caught the Pierrais squarely upon the chest, and Savoyard, smiting the deck at full length, lay gasping for breath like a drowning man, at the foot of the bridge-ladder.

"Good!" exulted Boime.

"Good!" echoed Laurentide. "I wish it had been my fist. And now that the yelping cur is out of the way we can finish our work."

Already the *Ulric* was dismantled, for it was a much easier matter to pull down her funnels, turrets and guns than to put them up. Her derrick booms were swung back into position, and half of her crew sent aboard the *Ile d'Argent* to get the skins out of her holds.

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In large lashed bundles the pelts ascended out of her hatches, swung slowly inboard at the ends of the derricks and dropped down into the *Ulric's* hold. Stavenger in the *Ile d'Argent's* hold tallied off the number and kind of skins as they rose. Gembland in the *Ulric's* hold checked them as they descended.

To a skin they took back their own, two thousand seven hundred and thirty-four old harps and five thousand seven hundred whitecoats. When the transfer was made, Laurentide recalled his men, cast off and picked up the pan they had set for bait floating far ahead.

Then, leaving the *Ile d'Argent* to retrieve her scattered boats, fleeing far to the southward, the *Ulric*, with eleven thousand three hundred and thirty-nine skins in her hold, steamed on into the north.

"There be more sealers lifting to th' southward," announced Boime, sweeping the seas with his glasses while they dropped the *Ile d'Argent* astern. "There be th' *Stephano* and *Bellaventure* and more I cans not make out. Savoyard's boats be pulling hard to board them. A wild tale his men wills have to tell, and a wild chase Savoyard wills have to gather them from half a dozen different ships. I tells you, Laurentide, he wills be too busy now to cross our course, and we wills not see him for many days!"

CHAPTER XV

ICE BOUND

TRULY for many days, while they voyaged northward in the quest of the Main Patch, taking just toll of the seas as they went, their course was uncrossed by Savoyard, and their hunting was peaceful hunting. Peaceful but even more perilous than before, for now they steamed upon the edge of the Labrador Current, that colossal oceanic river two thousand miles long by one hundred and fifty miles wide, which bore upon its breast the crude, shapeless masses broken from the Greenland glaciers and inhabited by the formidable hood seals.

The hoods, Navista learned from Laurentide, were so-called on account of a cowl-like covering of skin upon the heads of the males, which covering, becoming inflated when their anger was aroused, served as a protection against clubs or buckshot. They had no clearly distinguishing marking like the harps, and differed materially from them in habits and disposition.

Whereas the harps were gregarious, herding in large herds upon the Labrador coast ice, the hoods lived a solitary life upon the rougher Greenland floes. The hoods did not use blowholes, each family having its own ice-cake with water all about, and fierce, pugnacious, they were quick to resent any intrusion.

Perhaps it was the difficulty of taking them, perhaps it was the peril and uncertainty attending the capture, but the chase of the hoods held a marvelous lure for Laurentide. His soul had always revolted against the slaughter of the well-nigh helpless whitecoats, with their pleading eyes and baby-like, whimpering cries, and even the old harps, though swift to escape at the least opportunity, fell easily to rifles or to clubs when cut off from their blowholes. But in the hoods he had antagonists that demanded all his skill, strength and daring.

Their very habits increased the danger and lessened the rewards of the pursuit, for while among the closely herding harps a good hunter might kill fifty or seventy-five in a day, among the scattered hoods he could not secure half that number. The set of the Labrador Current kept the floes they inhabited drifting on the outer edge of the coast ice and exposed to the full force of the North Atlantic swell, and to reach them it was necessary to leap from cake to cake across yawning water-gaps.

Rifles were always used in hunting the adult hoods. True, the young could be killed with a gaff, but the difficulty was to get at the young, for, unlike most species of seals, the hoods have a highly developed parental instinct, the female protecting her pup and the male standing guard over both.

At the first sighting of the hoods, rifles and ammunition had been served out to thirty gunners of the *Ulric*. Each of the gunners was accompanied by three men, nicknamed "dogs", who carried the gunner's cartridges and skinned the seals he shot. Frequently Navista accompanied Laurentide who, because of his skill with a rifle, went upon the ice as one of the gunners, and there was never a day she went forth that her respect for the hood seal, and her

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admiration for the men who earned a livelihood by killing it, did not increase.

Morning after morning the *Ulric's* hardy crew entered lightly upon their daily cruises, as the ranging over the floes was termed. Scattered over the ice-fields many miles in extent, often out of sight of their vessel, often enveloped by fogs and snowstorms, or drifting about for hours on ice cakes disrupted by an unexpected blow before they could find a connected route back, they pursued their hazardous calling.

Sunday was their only day of rest. The law prohibited hunting on that day, and Boime's moral code prohibited any other form of work. Invariably Boime himself wrote the log of Sundays. It always ran thus:

Sunday, March —th: This being the Lord's Day, no seals were taken or hoisted. Crew washing and shaving this morning, walking on floes this afternoon. Tonight the captain spoke a little moral admonishment. So endeth this day.

And whether aboard ship as the *Ulric* sought new waters or sharing with her crew the perils of the floes, those were splendid days to Laurentide. He came to know officers and men better and found them the true sea bred, with marvelous courage, daily risking their lives in a matter-of-fact way.

With them he suffered the sear of the arctic winds, the white blotch of frost-bite, the ice blindness, akin to snow blindness with its torturing pain and red glimmer in the eyes, the freezing ocean bath through unseen blowholes or rotten skim ice, when the haven of the ship was miles away, and it was necessary to strip behind a hummock and, sheltered from the blizzard wind, wring out the soaked garments and don them again.

Only men of tremendous physique, inured by long endurance to grim hardship, could survive the experiences they were constantly undergoing. It was a supreme test of manhood, and in that supreme test Laurentide was not found wanting.

With all the rest he toiled from dawn to dark and half the night as well, and sometimes it seemed to Navista as if the spirits of the old Spanish Biscayans were reincarnated in his body and in the bodies of the other men, so assiduously they followed the rôle of hunters of beasts.

But the most wonderful thing of all those wonder days was his companionship with her, a companionship that developed with a significance which brought a profound sense of loss to Froude Boime's heart.

Ever since the inception of the *Ulric's* voyage, the boasting prophecy of Burgeo Savoyard had haunted Navista like a shadow, and under the sinister menace of his presence and his secret plundering her spirit had fretted in leash. But now that the shadow was lifted and Savoyard was tangibly disposed of for the time being, she tried to cast away all thought of him, gave her spirit free rein, and became wonderfully gay and tender. Boime was smitten with a vague regret to realize that it was Laurentide's, and not his own, efforts which had effected the change, but he was too great-hearted to harbor petty jealousy, too fatalistic to interfere.

He spent more and more time in the chart-room, lived more and more upon the bridge, and that very voluntary exclusion of himself from their company left Laurentide and Navista more and more together. He became her interpreter in all things. Through his eyes she saw many strange sights of the northern ocean, through his ears heard many strange sounds of the ice-laden deep that would otherwise have been lost to her consciousness.

The romance of that companionship was hourly spiced with danger and doubt, with the dread Labrador fogs, the winter blizzards, the ever-menacing floes and schools of bergs.

The rapidity with which weather and ice conditions changed, invariably lent a large element of uncertainty and suspense. One day would be incensed with the breath of spring, and they would see flocks of snowbirds going back to Baffin's Land, and wedges of eider, king eider and long-tailed ducks driving northward to their breeding grounds along the Labrador coast. Then the next day a freezing blizzard would be roaring in their ears and sheathing the *Ulric* in an armor-belt of ice.

And back of all this danger and doubt and uncertainty was the fear, flout it though they might, that Savoyard would soon be searching the seas to pillage from them once more. Navista had schooled herself to temporarily forget him. Froude Boime had declared with assurance that they would not see him for many days. Yet they saw him again sooner than they thought.

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BEFORE the *Ulric* had reached latitude fifty-one north, a strong arctic gale blew up unheralded, beating them back south of the fiftieth parallel, driving before it all the ice and all the ships within a radius of one hundred miles and packing the floes in along the whole East Coast.

For a full week the entire fleet, including the *Ile d'Argent*, lay ice bound in the outer reaches of Notre Dame Bay, with the headland of Cape St. John to the northwest of them and to the southeast the jumbled rock peaks of the archipelago formed by Gull, Twillingate, New World, Change and Fogo Islands.

Waiting the will of wind and current, they remained, unable to move, although many of the vessels such as the *Ulric*, the *Stephano* and the *Bellaventure* were the strongest ships afloat.

Yet this imprisonment held some solace, for now the sealers were in the closest touch they had been since leaving St. John's. Such as were equipped with wireless called one another to learn of fortune or misfortune. Those not equipped with wireless communicated by signals prodigally displayed. And when the drifting ice had ceased its drifting and lodged in a solid, motionless pack that stretched to the far horizon, the captains and crews had opportunity to visit each other's vessels.

Burgeo Savoyard was one who was quick to seize this opportunity. He went about from ship to ship, culling the remainder of the men he had not recovered since the *Ulric* ran him down, and in this process he was guyed unmercifully; for already, by word of mouth and wireless, the true tale of the Pierrais's adventure with the British cruiser had circulated through the entire fleet. Moreover, Savoyard was one whom no ship of the fleet wished to spare, what with his general reputation and the suspicion that he had tampered with more than the *Ulric's* pans.

Laughter and jeers, and voluminous references to pirate ships, four-inch shells and man-o'-war's prizes, met him whatever deck he visited. Some told him gravely that they had heard his cargo of skins had shifted in a seaway, and wondered how he had saved the *Ile d'Argent* from foundering. Others demanded to know what local blizzard drove his boats so far and wide, for with them that day the weather had been fine and clear. While still others showed strange curiosity concerning his patched funnel and mainmast.

But Savoyard cursed them one and all, swore that he would yet bring in more skins than the clumsy iron-clad *Ulric*, served blunt notice on the other ships that in St. John's he would expect due remuneration for the seals his men had killed for them while hunting on lay, and went back with his motley horde to the ice-bound *Ile d'Argent*.

It developed that of all the fleet the *Ile d'Argent* had the lowest tally of skins, four thousand in all. The *Ulric* headed the list with fifteen thousand. Between these extremes the tallies of the other vessels ran the gamut of poor, middling, fair and good fortune, and being in range of the wireless station at Cape Fogo on Fogo Island, the tale of their various fortunes was flashed to Fogo and relayed home to St. John's.

Relayed, too, elaborately and with embellishment, was the story of the *Ulric's* naval exploit and the man who had carried it out, and once the message was gone, Froude Boime grinningly assured Laurentide that St. John's long laugh had started.

Yet seven days of inaction could not be spent wholly in visiting from ship to ship, and in exchanging experiences and yarns. It was necessary to keep the crew of each ship in good spirits as well as in good physical condition. So the days were devoted to vigorous exercise, and the evenings to story-telling, practical joking and impromptu speech-making. Aboard the *Ulric* it fared badly with the ones who failed to respond when called upon to address the audience assembled in the "lobby" of the ship.

Laurentide, taking part with a zest in all the amusements, sentenced one delinquent to be painted black as a minstrel with soot, another rolled in a nearly emptied flour barrel till he was white as snow, and a third with his boots stripped off and his legs tied, planted like a statue in a partially filled molasses pail.

Still, it was in the daylight hours that Laurentide was in his glory, for to his astonishment and intense delight a man aboard the *Eagle* produced a football, and immediately clamoring hundreds followed the lure of it upon the frozen floes. It was an Association ball, worn and patched, but it answered the purpose, and Laurentide

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had a relapse to his boyhood days as he drilled those clamoring hundreds in the elements of play.

Each ship save the *Ile d'Argent* formed a team, and there, upon the bosom of the North Atlantic, was played out day by day the League of the Arctic Floes, till upon the seventh day the Sealers' Championship rested with the *Ulric's* team, captained by Laurentide himself.

Savoyard alone, watching and sulking aboard the *Ile d'Argent*, would not allow his men to take any part in the play, and as the whole fleet cheered the champion team of the *Ulric* at the close of play on the seventh day, Laurentide could not forbear to throw out a challenge to the Pierrais.

"Hadn't you better take a hand, Savoyard, and let us make a complete clean-up of the fleet?" he shouted at him. "I haven't the least doubt we can beat the *Ile d'Argent* too."

"*Ciel*, I do not play childish games like that," Savoyard shouted back. "*Par Dieu*, but I'll play a sea game with you, and I'll play it very soon. You cursed Yankee, you won't be swaggering on this ice pack within an hour. Turn your sweated face landwards! Don't you feel the first puff of the offshore wind? This pack's going to blow to *le diable* tonight, and we'll all be out by morning!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEALING CODE

SAVOYARD had read the signs aright. Before the hourly increasing offshore wind the ice-pack, taking the ships with it, went out that midnight in a thunderous booming. By morning, though surrounded on all sides by loosely drifting floes, the fleet had cleared Notre Dame Bay and worked over the fiftieth parallel again.

Simultaneously with their clearing of the Bay, they sighted a great many scattered herds of harps in the water. They were all old harps whose young had either been killed or reached the weaning age and been forced to shift for themselves, and now the parent seals were flying north along the coast after the whelping. They were not loitering upon the floes as they had done when coming south, but were swimming swiftly through the heaving swell, their instinct guiding them back along the Labrador coast to the Arctic waters whence they came.

To take them it was necessary to hunt from boats, and Laurentide, whose watch upon the bridge Navista was sharing according to her custom, nodded to the eager second-mate and boatswain who at first sight of the swimming-seals had cleared all the boats for action.

"Gembland, tell off the crews," he ordered, "and see that they have rifles, ammunition, gaffs and lines. Ready now? All right, Stevenger. Lower away."

All of the *Ulric's* eight boats went down, the two hanging in the port and starboard davits just aft of the bridge and the other six piled bottom up upon skids on the afterdeck at the ship's stern. The rest of the sealers had likewise lowered theirs, and a wonderful sight the hundred-odd craft made upon the ice-cluttered sea dashing into the swatching, as the shooting of the seals in the water was termed.

It was exciting hunting, for the wary animals began to dive as soon as approached. They had to come up to breathe, but their heads appeared as a target on the surface for only a few seconds before disappearing again.

Besides, if shot anywhere but in the throat, the seals sank and were lost. When shot fairly in the throat they floated for some time, and men were always ready in the boats to stick gaffs into them and tow them to a pan of ice where they were hauled out to safety.

Early in the afternoon, as the *Ulric* was steaming on, following the boats and picking up the bodies to be skinned aboard, Laurentide and Navista saw some large animals suddenly appear in the wake of the hunt, and very close on the starboard bow of the sealer.

"Walruses!" exclaimed Navista, as Laurentide grasped for his rifle.

"No, square flippers—the largest kind of seal," corrected Laurentide, observing them closely.

"But look at the size of them! They must be walruses!" she insisted. "And I can see their tusks!"

"Those aren't tusks but prominent canine teeth," he told her. "And a square flipper seal is as big as a walrus, and a very valuable prize. I must shoot quickly, before they get away!"

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With three swift shots Laurentide succeeded in bagging one before they all got off the floe, and running in close, the *Ulric's* derrick boom swung it aboard.

It was an immense animal, weighing over a ton, and while the men skinned it Navista gazed in amazement at its great jointless posterior limbs and flippers measuring more than a foot across.

"See, it belongs to the seal family," Laurentide pointed out to her, "although it does look so much like a walrus."

"I see now it's a seal," she admitted. "No wonder it's valuable. Look at that skin—five inches thick. And the pelt alone must weigh nearly one thousand pounds!"

"Yes, and its flippers are much tastier than the flippers of other seals," he informed her.

"Are they?" asked Navista quickly. "Then I'm going to join forces with the steward and serve a flipper supper tonight. I've made them at home from the smaller seals, and the supper will be just like the feasts prepared when the sealers get home to St. John's. I'll show you that there's at least one phase of sealing I know a lot about. You'll be the guest of honor because you made the supper possible."

"All right," accepted Laurentide banteringly. "There isn't any phase of sealing I'm afraid to dare!"

"Thanks," she laughed back as she went below to make her preparations for the feast, "and just for that slur on my cooking, I'll spice your serving extra well."

All the rest of the day the swatching of the old seals went on. As a rule this shooting of them in the water was not resorted to unless the ship was lying-to amid ice, and could not spend the time more profitably, for it was tedious and trying work, and the percentage of seals that sank, and thus were lost, generally ran high.

But these herds were traveling swiftly in the direction the sealers wished to go, and no time was wasted in panning them, since they were picked up by steamers in the wake of the boats.

So, steaming abreast in a line, their hundred-odd boats ahead of them sweeping the seas like a huge broom, the ships of the fleet harried the old harps northward near to latitude fifty-one. But off the North East Rock and Groix Island a blizzard-like snowstorm swooped down without warning, and a swell arose under the pounding floes that threatened the small craft afloat with instant destruction.

The *Ulric* luckily was steaming close upon her boats, but two of them were stove by the ice and their crews rescued by the others before she could get them all aboard. And so great was the danger that crews did not attempt to search out their own ships but took shelter upon the nearest vessel.

The *Ulric*, occupying a central position in the steaming fleet of sealers and being close up to the swatching line, became the haven for a goodly share of these fleeing boats.

Out of the smother of snow and grinding maelstrom of ice they came through the dusk with a heave and a crash, to be hoisted aboard with gunwales broken or their sides half stove in. Instead of harboring only her own crew, the *Ulric* harbored several ships' crews that night, and Navista's flipper supper for two hundred and seventy-five men she had to augment to feed one thousand.

She was just sitting down to preside over the captain's table where sat Boime, Laurentide, Glenaubin the chief engineer and some first-officers of the other sealers who had been in charge of the rescued boats, when there came the *thump-thump* of more small craft being hoisted aboard, and the thunderous tramping of feet on the decks.

"Still they be coming," smiled Boime, listening to the heavy tramping. "I wonders what crew that be. Maybe 't wills be Captain Wesley Kean's men o' th' *Newfoundland*. I marked them far ahead on our port bow when th' dye (snow squall) breaked."

ALL at the captain's table, and the first shift of men sitting at the lower tables, looked up expectantly, for the loud voice of Gembland, whose watch it was above, could be heard outside along with the stumping of two pairs of sea boots.

" 'T musts be Kean he be bringing," nodded Boime confidently.

In a moment the second-mate's snow-plastered oilskins appeared in the open doorway, and over his shoulder they saw the handsome, swarthy, fierce-mustached, hawk-nosed face of Burgeo Savoyard.

"It wuz the *Ile d'Argent's* boats we reskied jest naow, sir," announced Gembland,

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a shade of harshness creeping into his laconic tone as he looked straight at Froude Boime. "But I cal'late ez it's yerself, Cap'n, ez'll decide ef they stay!"

With grave premeditation Gembland moved aside and thrust the insolently smiling Pierrais into the frame of the doorway for all to see.

A silence like the hush of the ocean before some dynamic storm bursts fell upon the tables. Captain Boime half arose from his chair, a flood of impulses rioting across his craggy features like the play of lightning on some frowning granite cape.

It was plain to Laurentide, sitting as the guest of honor on Navista's right, that Boime was wrestling with a mighty temptation to order Savoyard and his men to be cast adrift again, and it was equally plain to him, knowing Boime's mental and moral solidity as he did, that Froude would not yield to that temptation.

"Burgeo Savoyard," Boime suddenly declaimed, "I knows th' decision as many men who sails these seas woulds give in this moment. You woulds be sent back into th' storm whence you comed to make th' *Ile d'Argent* by th' grace o' God or to perish as your just deserts.

"But I be not th' man to dare to time God's judgment for Him. You shalls stay with th' rest and receive bunk and fare like th' rest. But—" his stern, questioning eyes turning to Navista—"'tbe for th' daughter o' Captain Clode to say whether you shalls eat at th' table as once was his."

Boime let himself sink back into the chair from which he had half arisen, and as in Boime's face so in Navista's face Laurentide saw a conflict of emotions. Yet her indecision lasted only a moment. Then she was upon her feet before the gaping company of seamen waiting in hungry silence.

Her finely cut face with its full rounded cheeks was flushed a faint crimson under the glare of the electrics. Her fatalistic eyes, blue as the sea and changeable as the sea in her varying moods, blazed sapphire-like as with a toss of her head she shook back the fair curls encroaching on her temples.

"It was my father's table, and I will speak as my father would speak," she declared passionately. "He denied you his house ashore at St. John's, Burgeo Savoyard, but you know that like Froude Boime he would never deny you the haven of his ship in a storm. Nor would he send you, the captain of a sealer, to eat at a lower table or sulk with a ration in the forecastle.

"As his daughter I can do no less than he. I must forget for the space of a meal that you brought me the sorrow of his loss, forget your insults and persecution. So take your due place there among the officers of honest ships whom the blizzard has made the *Ulric's* guests. Your men will be fed in the second shift."

She pointed with an imperious finger, and Savoyard, his insolent smile radiating till it wreathed his whole swarthy face, moved across the room, the grace of the sea in his swaggering figure as it swayed to the roll of the ship, and took his seat at the first table.

Navista resumed her place, and instantly with her resumption of it the waiters under the direction of the fat steward Pondham began to serve the steaming flipper supper.

"But, Navista, how could you do that?" whispered Laurentide in protest as he leaned toward her. "Precedent or no precedent, I couldn't have brought myself to do it. How could you?"

"You're forgetting the sealing code, Ira," she replied, her voice quivering, so tightly she was holding the curb on herself. "The captain of any sealer commands the hospitality of any other sealer he may step aboard. It's the sealing code, Ira, a code I learned from my father, a code stronger than my desires and older than my wrongs!"

CHAPTER XVII

HAVEN FOR A NIGHT

STILL, though the supper went on apace and the various tasty dishes made from the flippers of the seal were served in due course, Laurentide felt, like Navista and Boime and all the other officers at the table, that he was eating it under strain.

There was little conversation. Boime's heavy voice, oddly subdued, made brief exchanges of experiences with the other officers. Savoyard, not directly addressed, had not ventured as yet to make any remark.

Laurentide now and then spoke with Navista in a low tone, but for the most part the meal progressed in awkward silence, and in that awkward silence the hum of the

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unembarrassed talk from the lower tables came distinctly to their ears.

It was all about seals and sealing that their great sea voices rumbled. Away at the bottom table Mauleen, the Irish lookout, was holding forth upon the maternal instinct of the parents, as evidenced in the mother seal leaving her young on the floes at morning to seek her day's food and returning to it unerringly at night no matter how large the herd might be, how many miles the floes had drifted in the meantime or how many points of the compass they had swung around.

Nearer at hand Stavenger, the boatswain, was extolling the fighting qualities of the hoods and telling of a curious thing he had experienced.

"It ban away back in eighteen ninety-eight when Ay ban on the Greenland," they heard him relating, "and it skall be just few days before her big bad fortune when out of a crew of one hundred and eighty we skall lose in a blizzard on the floes forty-eight men frozen to death and sixty-three bad with frost-bite.

"That morning we ban strike a good herd. Ay ban use the gaff on the harps when what skall Ay do but come on an old dog hood before Ay know. There ban nobody near to hit him on the flippers and make him turn 'round while Ay skall strike from the back, and Ay ban much batter got a gun. But Ay tank Ay skall kill him alone with club maybe.

"Ay hit him once, but he duck and catch the blow on his hood, and what skall he do but twist his head and grab my club in his teeth. Before Ay know what happen, he ban pull it out of my hand and hurl it straight at me. It knock me off my feet quick, and if it ban not be for one of the men who shoot from a distance with a gun Ay skall not be here to eat this flipper supper tonight."

Stavenger bared a mighty forearm to show the marks of the hood's teeth and claw-armed flippers, but several of the men, thinking the Norwegian was attempting to see how wild a tale they would swallow, cried out their derision.

But Savoyard turned in his chair at the captain's table and for the first time raised his voice.

"It is so," he corroborated. "Though Stavenger is no friend of mine, he speaks the truth. I tell you, *mon amis*, I saw the same thing happen to one of my crew, a man of Great Miquelon, and the club the hood hurled from his teeth not only knocked the man down, but it knocked him senseless as well. It happened on this trip, and the day was only a week ago Sunday."

"Sunday!" echoed Navista, flashing scornful eyes across the table. "Is there any one of the sealing laws you do not break? You know, Burgeo Savoyard, that the law expressly forbids taking any seals on Sunday."

"The law!" shrugged Savoyard. "Bah! Why should I concern myself about the law? It is only a farce. *Mon Dieu*, the seals are being exterminated anyway, so what does it matter whether they die seven days a week or only six? The law? Bah, again!"

"But the law is to prevent them being exterminated," she pointed out heatedly, "to protect them from such men as you!"

"And does it protect them from such as you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Look at the *Ulric! Ciel*, it is just such big hoggish steamers, with large crews armed with repeating rifles, that spell extermination for the seals. There are numbers to seals like any other thing. It has only one whelp a year. And behold your silly law. The silly law that does not protect it at the whelping time. Every other beast is protected, but the seal— *Mon Dieu*, yes, the seal is doomed, and, I repeat, it is vessels such as the *Ulric* that are dooming it!"

"I don't admit that," Navista differed. "I can't see how, for we take no more in proportion to our crew than a smaller vessel. And look at the thousands and thousands that escape to swell the herds for another year. The supply in the arctic seas must be almost limitless, and the weather is the greatest regulator of the catch."

"But call to your mind the catches of years past and compare them with the catches nowadays," urged Savoyard. "Take the years before steam-vessels came into use in Eighteen Sixty-two. The sailing-ships in those days, say between Eighteen Thirty and Eighteen Fifty, numbered four hundred and their crews numbered twelve to fourteen thousand men. They took upward of seven hundred thousand seals. *Par Dieu*, nearly a round million!

"And what about today? The fleet does well if it musters a score of vessels from St.

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John's and Conception Bay, and it is a good catch if they bring home two hundred thousand skins."

"Then the sealers of the old days were to blame," Navista declared. "They took too many."

"*Oui*, but blaming them will not save the seals of today," Savoyard reasoned. "Only restricting the size of steamer, crew and catch will do that."

"And," Boime put in, "if you restricts things so, th' industry wills not be worth while. 'T be a knotty point to please all people, and I thinks th' Government be doing th' best 't cans. I woulds not like to contemplate what woulds happen to th' Colony if th' industry died out. 'T do bring in an annual revenue o' about six hundred thousand dollars, but th' worth o' 't be a wonderful lot greater for 't do give impetus to th' other Colonial industries as follows later in th' season."

Savoyard shrugged his shoulders again and gave a nonchalant flirt of his hand.

"*Diable*, I care not whether it dies out or remains," he laughed. "I take my toll of the seas as I voyage them, whether it be seals or fish or whales. It is enough for me, and *par Dieu*, the next generation can look out for itself as I have had to do. I care not. Only, I wanted to show Navista what a beautiful thing was the law which she flouted in my face."

"Some day the law will be flouted in your face by a sterner hand than mine," she prophesied, setting the example of rising from the table to let the next shift of men come on. "And in that day you will realize how much greater a toll you might have got out of life if always you had observed the law. Now I must excuse myself. I have endured your company long enough to comply with the demands of hospitality, Burgeo Savoyard, but there's no reason why I should endure it longer. Froude Boime will have Pondham, the steward, show you the officers' quarters and whatever sleeping accommodation can be found for your crew on a ship that has already one thousand men aboard."

"But wait, wait, Navista," begged Boime, staying her by the arm as she went to pass out of the doorway, "be you going to your cabin?"

"Yes, Froude, I've been on the bridge and on the deck all day. I'm tired, and this last hour—" passing a hand across her eyes with a gesture of fatigue—"has been something of a strain. Why? Do you want me for anything?"

"I woulds ask you to sleep in th' chart-room tonight, Navista."

The request struck the listening Laurentide as strange, and he cast a swift glance at Navista and Boime and then at Savoyard. The latter was quicker of wit. He had caught the significance of the request and a wave of wrath flushed his swarthy skin. He leaned forward to Boime, his black eyes flashing and his mustache bristling.

"*Mon Dieu*, are you afraid I shall arise before morning and carry her off to the *Ile d'Argent* if she sleeps in the first cabin quarters?" he demanded.

"I be afraid o' nothing but th' might o' God," replied Boime, gazing at him calmly with the great, gray eyes which seemed to see through him and glimpse some worthier image beyond. "But 't be a charge as lies upon me. There be a dying man's voice in my ears this moment, Burgeo Savoyard, putting that charge upon me. 'You wills watch over her aboard,' 't says, 'for I coulds not rest in th' deep for th' fear o' Burgeo Savoyard seeking her out while there be none to protect her and carrying her off in his pirate ship!' "

Laurentide heard Savoyard draw breath with a sharp whistling sound and saw his swarthy skin pale to a brassy shade where but a moment before it had flushed blood-red.

The Pierrais' flashing glance wavered. He could not meet Boime's gaze, a gaze that seemed to strip away his body and uncover his soul to the scorn of all the men. Nor could he meet Navista's eyes, filled as they were with memories which Boime's words had awakened, with painful memories and powerful accusations.

"So you wills sleep in th' chart-room, Navista!"

"But yourself, Froude? You will have no place to rest!"

"I wills not rest this night. Th' ice be rafting wonderful bad about, and I wills stay on watch till morning. Don't feel as you deprives me o' rest, Navista, for I woulds not be sleeping anyway."

"All right, then, Froude," assented Navista wearily. "I shall consent to sleep in the chart-room since you say you would not be using it anyhow. But, seeing that

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the ship is so crowded, my cabin must be pressed into service for some one else. And so, Pondham—" addressing the fat English steward—"you may see to that."

"Very good, Miss Navista," bowed Pondham, "and I shall harve the best o' care tyken o' it."

"And use mine, too, Pondham," proffered Laurentide. "I shall keep Boime company in his all-night watch."

"Very good, sir! It's very gen'rous o' 'ee, sir!"

Savoyard shot a malignant side-glance at Laurentide as the latter spoke.

"So, *mon* Yankee," he sneered, "you fear my night activity also?"

"A man may not fear a thing and yet decide to take no chances on it," Laurentide returned bluntly. "Froude Boime is right, and if we are at all suspicious of you, Savoyard, you have only yourself to blame. He is decided to have no piratical abduction or any other disturbance aboard the *Ulric* tonight. Those things have no doubt happened on certain ocean voyages, but in the sealing business, as I have seen it for several years, there is neither time nor place for them.

"This is the twentieth century, you recollect! These men are not sailing the North Atlantic for the romance of it, but for their daily bread. They've followed the harp herds all day in the boats, and tonight they want to sleep. So take my advice and sleep also!"

Savoyard's face darkened, and his whole frame quivered where he stood.

Laurentide stared at him coolly, his heavy shoulders set ready to throw his weight against any sudden charge.

"Well? What is it?" he demanded. "Have it off your mind and you'll rest better."

Savoyard half started a spring from his toes, recovered himself in the act and with a stifled imprecation swung away to the first-cabin quarters with Pondham, the English steward.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAIN PATCH

ALL night, while the *Ulric's* crew shared bed and blanket with their storm-guests, while the first and second cabin quarters were crammed and men lay packed like sealskins in the steerage and forecastle, Laurentide and Boime paced the bridge within sight of the chart-room door behind which Navista slept the deep sleep that comes of combined bodily fatigue and emotional strain.

All night, while the steamer made but little headway against the floes which the storm had brought down, the ice continued to raft around her with a hoarse grinding and booming, but the tumult did not disturb the girl. She slept soundly till just before sunrise, and then slipped out on the bridge where Laurentide watched with Boime.

Both were staring at the waste of ice. Navista's eyes followed theirs, and great as were the quantities she had already seen on the voyage, she realized that she had had no conception of the immensity of these ocean-borne floes, expelled from the arctic regions, till the lemon-colored dawn revealed the illimitable frigid desert about her, smoked here and there with clammy frost fogs.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, as she swept the four compass-points with her glasses. "The whole North Atlantic must be covered with it. It looks as if the Arctic Ocean had suddenly broken its boundaries and moved down on us."

Laurentide whirled round at the sound of her voice.

"Yes," he smiled, "it's the main floe. You see that field ice? Well, it's out of Hudson's Strait. For though Hudson's is always the home of rapid races and tidal currents wonderfully uncertain in set and velocity, the marked preponderance of northerly winds gives the field-ice as a whole a resultant eastwardly drift. It ultimately sweeps out into the North Atlantic, to be carried down by the Labrador current."

"But, Ira, it's mixed with heavier ice and bergs. This can't all be out of Hudson's Strait."

"No, the arctic current cuts across the mouth of Hudson's Strait with a southerly set of one mile an hour, and it has carried yon heavy ice and bergs with it out of Davis Strait, though the roughest of it is the East Greenland pack. You know geography, Navista, and you'll understand that the East Greenland pack comes round Cape Farewell and swings along Greenland's southwestern shore to join the Baffin's Bay

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ice I spoke of, as it is carried down by the arctic current. It's a formidable-looking thing to encounter, this main floe, but it's what the *Ulric* has been trying to meet."

"It's there you hope to find the Main Patch, is it?"

"Yes, if all signs don't fail we should be close to it. We're about in the latitude of Belle Isle Strait, and as a rule the big herd is on the edge of the main——"

"Seals, ho!" interrupted the bellow of the lookout on the mainmast above them. "Swar-rms av thim! By the bear-rd av Saint Pathrick, ut's the Main Patch. Main Patch, ho! Hard ahead!"

And Navista's conception of the herd was like her conception of the floes. She had seen large herds before, but never till she set eyes on the Main Patch did she conceive to what size seal herds might attain.

"Gracious! Acres and acres of them!" she cried astounded. "Look—they blacken the ice for miles!"

"Aye, 't be th' largest Main Patch I haves ever looked on," cut in the big voice of Boime, a voice trembling with exultation. "Th' *Ulric* haves hit 't fair. There musts be nearly four hundred thousand seals. Still we needs to be quick.

"This ice pack woulds look to th' uninitiated as if 't woulds hold for months, but men like Laurentide and me knows better. Ice be extraordinarily sensitive to th' two agents wind and current, Navista. 'T mights open any moment and let the seals away. Ho, Gembland, Stavenger—" making his loud shouts ring through the ship—"'t be th' Main Patch at last! Overside all!"

Pandemonium broke forth upon the *Ulric*, for the words "Main Patch" were words of magic which brought Savoyard and the other officers out of the first cabin quarters, brought every one of the one thousand-odd men on deck with a run.

The wind as well as the snow had died with the dawn. The vast ice-pack lay solid, and studding the white expanse were the dark hulls of other steamers round about, and beyond the bulge of the pack the masts and funnel smokes of the rest of the fleet.

THE other ships were as wild with excitement as the *Ulric* herself. They signaled madly and sent up smoke-rockets for their men, and between the vessels equipped with the wireless, messages began to sizzle, calling for the more distant sealers to crowd up to the kill.

The *Ulric* had somewhat the advantage of the rest in proximity to the herd, and her men, together with the strange crews aboard, seized their weapons and dropped over the ship's side on to the floes. Some in their eagerness went without breakfast. Others paused only a moment to swallow a sandwich and a cup of steaming coffee handed from the galley and then followed into the fray.

The strange crews could not launch their boats on account of the heavy ice, but they lowered them down from the davits and ran them by hand out on top of the floes so that they might not be left littering the *Ulric's* decks and obstructing the work of her derricks when it came to loading.

In the lead of the thousand-odd men ran Laurentide and Stavenger at the head of the *Ulric's* crew. After them rushed Savoyard and his motley horde from the *Ile d'Argent*, and after them streamed the crews belonging to the other ships according to their speed. These were from the more distant ships, but the ships themselves were headed toward the Main Patch.

From the west and south they began recklessly to ram their way in closer, opening water lanes at their bows which immediately closed behind them, and spilling their complements on the ice.

It was a mad scene, such a scene as Navista had never thought to witness in the prosaic Twentieth Century. She felt that it was like some atavistic recurrence of the azoic periods, this charge of two thousand club-armed men upon nearly half a million beasts.

All kinds of seals composed the herd: harps, hoods and square flippers, old and young; whitecoats, pallid as the newly fallen snow they lay upon; ragged jackets, which were the young harps with the first coat shed and clothed in a second more hairy coat that looked like the soaked hide of a Newfoundland dog—and cats, young ones under forty pounds, and not usually bothered with.

For the seals there was no chance of escape. The rafting of the ice had closed the blowholes and left them all stranded with no place to retreat.

There was no open water in sight. East, west and north their enemies surrounded

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them, and to the south lay the smoking, ramming fleet of ships. Upon them fell relentless men with gaff and rifle, and the chaste white silence of the crystal plains was shattered with the clamor of the bloody fray.

The whimpering of the whitecoats rose like the cries of children in Laurentide's sensitive ears, and he turned from the slaughter of them and the old harps, which were clubbed like sheep, to use a rifle on the monstrous square flippers and the pugnacious, dangerous hoods, whose growling reverberated back and forth across the floes like rolling thunder.

There was no time to skin. Each crew dragged their trophies to a heap, identified by the ship's flag, and to this heap each vessel began to ram its way in order to hoist the bodies to be skinned aboard.

By noon the colossal battue was made, and save for the *Newfoundland's* crew and the crews of some of the other ships which still pursued scattered herds, detached fragments of the Main Patch, far to the northward, all available hands on all the vessels turned to for the hoisting.

Laurentide and Stavenger, making up the tally of skins, were waiting with their men at the *Ulric's* pan as the sealer wedged her way through the ice and hove alongside.

Navista who was on the bridge with Boime hailed them eagerly.

"How many?" she demanded excitedly, running her eyes over the huge dimensions of the pile. "How many have you taken?"

"Stavenger makes it a little over thirty-four thousand," Laurentide answered as he climbed over the *Ulric's* side.

"Ay ban make it thirty-four thousand, three hundred and thirty-nine," figured Stavenger.

"There may be errors in the men's count," Laurentide pointed out. "Call it thirty-four thousand, three hundred, for safety."

"Then with the fifteen thousand we had when we were blocked in Notre Dame Bay, the seven hundred and sixty-seven taken with the boats yesterday, we have fifty thousand and sixty-seven skins!" cried Navista. "And that means we've beaten the *Florizel's* record!"

A loud shout burst from the throats of the *Ulric's* crew. Caps and gaffs flew in the air, and with a vim they fell to work at the hoisting.

From the whole fleet arose the roar and rattle of winches and the creak of derricks as the heavy bodies were hauled aboard.

"You wouldn't think to look at those ugly bodies that the skins would encase pretty women's feet," observed Laurentide to Navista, as they stood watching the hoisting. "But the finest grades of Russia and patent leather boots, in which city women walk the pavements, are made of those very skins. What is more, most of the kid gloves they wear are made of the split seal-leather.

"And the seal-oil itself they use far more than they are aware. It forms the basis of the perfumes and high-priced scented soaps they use in their toilet. With the stearin extracted—the stearin is what gives it the fishy smell—they drink it as tasteless cod-liver-oil to build up their systems, or as olive-oil for their complexions. Fancy, Navista—olive-oil here among the arctic floes where we aren't within thousands of miles of Lucca's fruit!"

"It does sound strange," admitted Navista, with a shiver running through her frame as a cold puff of newly rising wind struck her. "But thus does beauty and utility and fragrance come out of ugliness, waste and slaughter."

"Yet," ventured Laurentide a moment later, "if those women who unknowingly wear and use the products of the seal hunt were here to see men daily risk their lives to supply the market, don't you think they'd turn to other material or cause a revolution in style?"

"They might," she returned, "if they really understood. But would the sealers as a whole want that revolution? I think not. It is their bread. They go down to the sea with full knowledge of the hazard they take, and this time the *Ulric's* crew will get more than their earned wage. My father told me the profits of a voyage are divided into three shares, one for the owner of the vessel, one for the outfitter and one for the crew.

"I'm owner and outfitter. I get two shares, but when we arrive home at St. John's I'm going to add a bonus for every member of the crew."

"And at St. John's," he whispered with daring significance, "I warn you, Navista, that I'm going to demand a bonus like every other member of the crew!"

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CHAPTER XIX

HOMEWARD BOUND

THE last of the seals were hoisted aboard. The derrick booms ceased their swinging, and the winches purred themselves into silence on the *Ulric*, though the clatter still went on aboard some of the other vessels.

The *Ile d'Argent* lay next the *Ulric*, half a mile away, and as the hoisting ceased on the steel steamer, Savoyard came shouting and gesturing across the ice space that stretched between the two ships.

"What is your catch, *mon* Yankee?" he yelled at Laurentide. "How many skins do you total now?"

"Any error, Stavenger?" Laurentide asked the boatswain before he answered.

"We ban only five short on my first tally today, sir," announced Stavenger.

"Thirty-four thousand three hundred and thirty-four, today," Laurentide shouted triumphantly. "Fifty thousand one hundred and one altogether. We've smashed the *Florizel's* record and established one that'll stand for years to come!"

"*Mon Dieu*, have you?" snarled Savoyard. "The *Ile d'Argent* took over forty thousand today, but you had me handicapped to begin with. You, I say, for that clod Boime had not the wit to compass the stealing of my skins. But by the bones of *le diable*, I'll beat you yet. It shall never be told in St. John's that a cursed Boston Yankee brought in more skins than Burgeo Savoyard. With what I had in my hold before, I lack only a few thousand skins, and *par Dieu*, I'll get them and race you into port."

Roaring a command to the *Ile d'Argent's* men, he dashed northward over the floes with them in the direction of the *Newfoundland's* crew and the other crews who were pursuing the scattered herds.

"Come back," Laurentide bellowed at him. "Don't be a fool and take crazy chances. There are men away up there now who ought to be on their vessels. Stay aboard your ship. It's snowing already, and it's going to blow up another big storm!"

"*Mon Dieu*, I'll get my skins in spite of any storm that ever blew out of the arctic!" boasted the Pierrais.

He shook a wrathful fist at Laurentide and pressed on to disappear in the erratic slant of the snow squalls.

Weight for weight it paid the sealers better to stow only skins and blubber and not the carcasses of the animals in their entirety. So at once the skinning commenced aboard, and the *Ulric*, the *Ile d'Argent* and such other vessels as counted a full catch, cast the carcasses overside in order that they might be rid of the superfluous tonnage of the flesh and ready to turn homeward the moment the ice pack should open.

The ice was soon covered with thousands of bodies left to bleach upon it, and while the work progressed the threatening snow squalls thickened, and before night a howling blizzard was raging on the floes. It filled the air like a pall and masked the ships from each other, but those aboard the *Ulric* could hear the vessels whose crews were still upon the ice crashing about in anxious activity to reach their men.

They heard them ramming the floes continually, blowing sirens, firing rifles, and now and them resounded the raucous boom of dynamite, used either in an attempt to clear water lanes or to give the location of the ships to their missing crews.

It was a night of apprehension to every one aboard the *Ulric*, and most apprehensive of all was Navista. For her eternal dread of these pitiless seas was ever present with her, and she had known so many catastrophes to occur on the sealing-grounds that she yearly dreaded another.

She slept but little all night. The possible fate of the crews caught in the blizzard filled her mind. Had they all got safely back, the *Newfoundland's* men and the other crews and reckless Burgeo Savoyard?

Early in the morning she was upon the bridge with Laurentide and Boime, trying to get a glimpse of the other ships, but the weather was thicker than ever. The *Ulric* might have been a solitary sealer embedded in the North Atlantic floes so thoroughly was it isolated by the storm from the rest of the fleet, but beyond the sifting tempest, perhaps two miles away, perhaps three, perhaps five miles, Navista knew more vessels lay isolated like her own, with their captains and crews as anxious and apprehensive as she.

Yet, though she watched with vigilance all day for a lull in which some ship might be revealed for a moment, such a lull did not

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come. Snow hissed by in a perpetual aerial torrent. The gale was rising all the time. And under the pressure of the gale the ice pack was slowly beginning to open.

Then just before dark the *Ile d'Argent* dove without warning out of the smother straight across the *Ulric's* bows, driving so close that a man could have tossed a seal skin from deck to deck.

Savoyard was on the bridge, his tall figure towering through the drift of the storm, swaying with his old grace to the tremendous rolling of his ship, a sardonic laugh breaking from him as he waved an arm to the two men and the girl upon the *Ulric's* bridge.

"By the bones of *le diable*, I have skins enough to beat you!" he roared.

"God were lenient with you, Burgeo Savoyard, that you and your crew dids not leave your bodies to bleach on th' floes like th' bodies o' th' harps," Boime shouted back. "'T be wonderful sinful to tempt Providence as you dids along o' taking such a dangerous risk. But what o' th' *Newfoundland's* crew and th' others."

"I didn't speak the *Newfoundland's* men themselves, but I spoke most of the other crews, and so far as I know everybody got back in safety," bellowed the Pierrais. There in the Capital you will see more of me, you Bonavistan outporter, you cursed Yankee—*oui*, and proud Navista!"

With another wave of his arm he was gone in the savage tumult of the elements, and as he disappeared they heard his fearless voice raised in the Siren's Song of the Sea. On the wings of the wind the wild chanted words came back to them:

"Come, come to my full lips' flowing,
Come with the western breeze,
Under the sunset glowing
Here on my carmine seas;
Winds of the east steal sighing
Of a love where the mornings dawn,
But love loves best in its dying,
By resistless forces drawn—
'Neath my fond passion the spirit is dumb,
Come—will you come?

"Come, am I not worth the danger?
Love does not think of death,
And the strange heart beats the stranger
When it feels my silver breath;
My eyes for your toil and taunting,
My arms for your thorny bed,
My presence your slumber haunting,
My breast for your weary head—
'Neath my fond passion the spirit is dumb,
Come—will you come?"

While they listened on the bridge of the *Ulric*, Navista, Laurentide and Boime stared into one another's eyes as if to read one another's thoughts.

"He's thrown a challenge in our teeth, Boime!" Laurentide burst out. "Are we going to let him get away with it?"

"'T be a wonderful risk to drive for home tonight in this storm," declared Boime, a strange glow firing his granite face, "but he haves stirred my blood along o' his taunts and boasts, and I be half minded to follow. Still, 't be Navista's ship and th' cargo—to say nothing o' th' men's lives—be valuable, and 't be for her to say at the last if we takes the risk."

Navista was gazing after the *Ile d'Argent* with a tense face, her body poised forward like a runner on the mark.

"Yes, Froude, take the risk," she decided with a stamp of her foot upon the bridge. "He shall not hold us up to scorn as cowards. And—" her flashing eyes turning to Laurentide's—"I believe he lied about his catch. He can not honestly have as many skins as we have."

"If he has, he stole enough to make up," declared Laurentide.

"I know it," she nodded, "and even if that is so, he shall not have the honor of being first into St. John's. So lay your course for home, Froude, and before he raises Cape St. Francis he'll find out that he is not the only seaman on the seas."

"All right, Navista!" cried Boime with alacrity as he rang up the engine-room and gave the wheelsman his directions. "And, please God, the *Ulric's* good fortune wills last her on to th' end!"

The sealer's head came slowly round. She hung a moment in the eye of the wind, brutally buffeted by the driving floes. Then she heeled off with a rush to the southward in the wake of the *Ile d'Argent*.

The words of the Siren's song with which Savoyard had challenged them across the storm-tossed deep remained to echo in their hearts, and, voicing their acceptance of the Pierrais's challenge, Stavenger, the Norwegian boatswain, standing among the anchor chains on the foredeck, struck up an answering chant.

In a berserker voice that split the tumultuous hurricane he rolled it forth, the weird Icelandic song of Ran's Cup, the song of skalds and Vikings which, translated, runs:

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The rugged shore of Iceland is its rim,
Its bottom where the clinging hell shoon skim,
Its reach as far as Bifrost's bridge may span,
Fearsome and fathomless, the cup of Ran!
Boast not, boast not around the festive board;
Boast not as free the warming wine is poured;
Swear not loud vows in fever of the sup—
The sable goddess holds a sober cup!

Hold hard the helm; for northwise dins the storm,
And misty clouds come by like spirit form!
Boaster, how runs the wine within thy veins?
Cold as the clank of icy grapnel chains!
Yea, cold, for here's no light of lamp or smile
Or singing saga striking chords the while;
The waves snarl white, hungry for ship and man—
Boaster, hast heart to drink the cup of Ran?

CHAPTER XX

FLOTSAM

SINCE the snow of Tuesday morning shut out the sun, the *Ulric* had had no opportunity to take observations to determine her exact position, and now it was Wednesday night, the end of the first day of April. But, allowing for their drift with the ice-pack since striking the main patch, Boime roughly figured the ship's latitude as something below fifty-one north.

Of the longitude he could not be sure, although he judged the *Ulric* to be between fifty-four and fifty-five west.

Yet of one thing he felt reasonably certain, and that was that all night amid darkness and storm he was coaxing his vessel at half speed across that gigantic wedge of Atlantic waters thrust into the Newfoundland coast between Stormy Cape at its northern extremity, and Cape Freels halfway up its eastern seaboard. His course was to slip safely between Fogo Island and Brenton Rock and thus round Cape Freels. And Thursday's dawn flaring clear showed what kind of seaman he was.

Well astern on the starboard quarter loomed the familiar contour of Cape Freels, and before them rolled the white-capped waters of another inlet.

"'T be Bonavista Bay!" cried Boime to Laurentide who had come on the bridge to relieve him at dawn. "Haves you ever been in th' outport o' Bonavista?"

Laurentide shook his head.

"I were borned there," Boime explained, his crag-like face aglow and his heavy forefinger pointing toward the granite cliffs, "and raised on th' breath o' th' sea. There be th' lighthouse on th' point. And you cans make out yon surges? Well, th' harbor o' Bonavista be wide open to th' Atlantic gales, and in Winter th' surf do break for a furlong and more across th' main street o' th' village."

"Good heavens! Then why don't they build a breakwater?" demanded the progressive Laurentide.

"Fisher folk be poor," Boime returned, "and breakwaters be wonderful extravagant. Besides, 't be not th' way o' my people. As they be borned so they do live after th' manner o' their fathers before them, ay, and their fathers before them."

Laurentide was sweeping the seas with his glasses for a sign of the *Ile d'Argent* while Boime talked.

"You haven't seen anything of Savoyard, have you?" he demanded.

"No. 'T mays be he haves drived outside th' island rocks o' Brenton and Funk and do steam to port and astern o' us."

"Then you think he's not ahead of us?"

"He cans hardly be, 'less he drived the *Ile d'Argent* at full speed all night."

"He's madman enough to do that, Boime, and he swore he'd make St. John's ahead of the *Ulric*. So I'm looking to raise his smoke around some of these jutting capes. We have the greater speed, and I feel that we shall beat him yet. I calculate we're ninety miles from St. John's Harbor now."

"About ninety, counting from th' Cape," nodded Boime, waving toward Cape Bonavista bulging into the sea. "We wills make 't by afternoon. You haves clear weather for th' last miles o' th' run home, Laurentide, and th' ship be in your hands. I be going to turn in till we reaches Cape St. Francis. My eyes be heavy with th' night-strain, and I woulds be fresh when we enters St. John's. And I feels as you feels, that there we wills be first in spite o' Burgeo Savoyard's boasts, for 't be a good omen that th' sun haves shined forth to show me my Bonavista birthplace!"

Boime had hardly disappeared into the chart-room when Navista came hurrying on to the bridge.

For a moment she stood silently staring at the frowning seaboard, and upon her face Laurentide saw the look he had seen upon Boime's face when the latter gazed upon Bonavista.

"I know, I know, Navista!" he burst out before she could speak. "I know what's in your heart."

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"Yes, it's my birthland, Ira," she sighed, "and I've come to it abruptly, as it were, out of another world."

"I can realize just how you feel, and I'm so glad you'll have sunshine into St. John's. It will not be many hours now till you're there, girl!"

"What about Savoyard?" she asked, suddenly dropping from visionary to concrete things. "Have you sighted the *Ile d'Argent* at all?"

"Not yet," he told her. "Boime thinks he's somewhere behind. I fancy he's ahead. I've been watching for him all the time."

"Give me your glasses, and I'll watch," begged Navista. "You give your attention to the ship and make all the speed you can."

SON BY wild boglands studded with glacial boulders, by desolate hills and ridges of starved birch-trees, by a thousand rocky inlets and towering tricolored capes, the *Ulric* drove, past Catalina Head, past Trinity Bay, past Split Point, past Conception Bay. But no sign of the *Ile d'Argent* or any other ship did they raise.

Tuesday's violent storm had smitten all the east coast, strewing it with wreckage, and they had the scoured seas to themselves. They rounded Cape St. Francis, and as far as the bold loom of Cabot Tower there was no hull, mast or funnel smoke to be seen.

"By heavens, Navista!" groaned Laurentide; "he's won. He's won or else Boime's right and he's left hopelessly astern. Jove, I was forgetting! Boime said to wake him at St. Francis!"

"Savoyard can't have won," asserted Navista through set teeth as she held the glasses fixedly. "He positively can't. I'll never admit it till I see him tied up to the docks. Though there's nothing at all astern and—only a field of drift-ice ahead."

"Seals, ho!" hailed the lookout from aloft.

Laurentide paused half way to the chart-room.

"Seals?" he echoed, staring unbelievingly up the mainmast. "There can't be seals so near St. John's. You must be seeing things, Mauleen!"

"No-o-o—min!" amended the lookout in a strident bawl. "Min on the floes. By the bear-rd av Saint Pathrick, there's something wrong!"

With a startled yell for Boime, Laurentide banged open the chart-room door and ran back to Navista.

"Is it men?" he asked breathlessly, leaning on the foreside bridge rail beside her. "How many men?"

"Yes, men!" gasped Navista, the color leaving her face. "But I—I can't hold the glasses steady enough to make them out well. Here, Ira, you look!"

As Laurentide took the binoculars from her trembling hands, Boime tramped out on the bridge.

"What be the matter?" he demanded. "We be past St. Francis, eh? And be sighting drift-ice ahead?"

"And men on the ice!" blurted Laurentide. "Most of them are lying down. There must be fifty or more in the jumble."

"By the glory fits!" exclaimed Boime, joining Laurentide and Navista with a jump that shook the bridge structure. "'T be too many for a schooner. Cans 't be a Labrador mail-boat?"

Swiftly the forms on the ice grew in the field of the lenses handed back and forth between Laurentide and Boime and then in the field of the naked eye.

"The *Ile d'Argent's* men!" cried Navista, horror-struck.

Her voice was raised hysterically, almost to a shriek, and in her voice and in her eyes Laurentide heard and saw the essence of that dread of the deep which he had known of since the first day he met her.

"But it can't be, Navista," he argued. "The *Ile d'Argent* carried a crew of one hundred and seventy-five."

"The *Ile d'Argent's* men—what is left of them!" she repeated in that strange, wild key. "Look at the face of that man staggering about with uplifted hands. That's the Brunet man who was Savoyard's first mate, and there's one of Little Miquelon and—one of St. Pierre."

"By the glory fits, so 't be, so 't be!" cried Boime, his cavernous tone crashing like thunder on their strained nerves.

He sprang away as abruptly as he had joined them, with a shout to the wheelsman.

"Roden, port your helm—you wills run them down!" he bellowed, at the same time banging the engine-room signals for STOP. "Gembland, Stavenger, have all hands stand by with ropes. Those men cans not climb, and there be some gruesome hoisting here."

The *Ulric* lost way, and slowly, very slowly ground her side against the tossing floe

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with its burden of men. For one moment this grim flotsam of the seas passed by under the wide, staring eyes of the three on the bridge. They saw a mass of prostrate bodies, stiffened in various postures, with faces bleached white as the snow beneath them and glazed eyes turned unwinking to the sparkling sunshine.

Of the mass only three showed signs of life. The first-mate from the Brunets tottered drunkenly about with his uplifted hands. The Little Miquelon man sat hunched forward at the hips, his head between his knees, trying to crane a neck that the frost had numbed. While the one of St. Pierre, resting at full length on the ice and propped on his elbow made a futile attempt to rise, gave it up with a groan and rolled over on his back.

For a moment only, they saw it. Then the floe slid under the *Ulric's* hull and was blotted out by scores of the crew dropping overside upon it and scores more crowding the rail with ropes in their hands.

"Keep th' bridge, Laurentide," ordered Boime. "I wills go down to oversee. And you, Navista, stay here too. 'T be a bitter sight for a woman's eyes."

Yet even on the bridge Navista could not help but see. One by one the stiffened and the fast-stiffening bodies came up before her eyes: first the Brunet man, the Little Miquelon man and the man of St. Pierre, then their quiet comrades, and last of all those quiet ones rose the form of Burgeo Savoyard, the form that had so often swaggered before her and swayed with the grace and the mobile strength of the sea.

He had lain prostrate like the rest, one mere indistinguishable clod of a mass of lifeless clay, but in his body the spark of life which fired his mate and the other two of his crew still fought a feeble fight for survival.

The bite of the hoisting rope on his chest roused him from his frost coma. When his feet touched the deck his rigid hands descended upon the rail, and he swayed there for a second like a statue partly galvanized into life. He caught his breath with a gurgling sound as men loosed the loop on his chest, and his words gushed forth like a wail of anguish.

"*Ciel*, it was my fault," he whined hoarsely, his glassy eyes fixed on Laurentide and Navista on the bridge. "We struck the drift-ice last night off Split Point. My men were for slowing down and going round, but I was mad and would not listen. I was driving at full speed for St. John's, and I swore by the bones of *le diable* I would go through any floe that ever came down from the Arctic.

"*Par Dieu*, it was two floes—*crunch! crack! boom*—and the *Ile d'Argent* crushed in a moment between them like a cardboard box. There was no time for boats, no time for anything but to leap to the floes. Those below must have drowned like rats in their cabins and these—*mon Dieu!* May the Virgin Mary forgive me!"

He collapsed suddenly from the rail, slipping through the hands outstretched to catch him, dying himself upon the very deck where he had struck down another man.

In that moment it all came back to Navista: the March morning of the sealers' sailing, herself upon the cliffs watching them out of the Narrows, the jamming of the *Ulric* and the *Ile d'Argent* in the lead of open water and Savoyard leaping across her father's rail with a knife in his hand.

It all came back in a swift, poignant vision, and she suddenly swayed to Laurentide and buried her face on his shoulder with tempestuous emotion shaking her frame.

Laurentide's arms tightened round her as arms that have the right.

"Hush, hush, Navista!" he pleaded. "Good God! girl, your sobs are like knives in my heart. Hush! I know the past hurts, but there's life, love, all things ahead. The *Ulric's* a cleared ship with a share for her crew that will make happy homes for every one of them. You must be thankful because of that and because you're safe home yourself!"

The responsive tightening of her own arms on his shoulders thrilled him with a mighty thrill.

"Yes, yes, Ira," she faltered, raising fatalistic eyes which, though haunted with the memory of the past, were at the same time luminous with the dawning dream of the future, "yes, safe home with—with you!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE TOLL OF THE DEEP

NOT as she had thought to come, with all her colors flying, with rockets going up from her bridge and cheering crew lining her bulwarks did the *Ulric* enter the Har-

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bor of St. John's. Silently she steamed in through the Narrows with her flag at half-mast and fifty-one dead, encased in caskets of ice from their wave-drenching, lying out on her fore-deck.

As she wound between the mighty rock portals the signal gun of the lower station began to boom in spaced, muffled reports like the slow tolling of a deep-toned bell.

"It's for us," whispered Navista, pressing close to Laurentide's side on the bridge. "They've seen from Signal Hill."

Then the quiet landlocked water burst suddenly upon their vision. Navista saw again the harbor, framed by the gray wharves and somber rock beaches, lying like a silver mirror. Against the wharves the mail-boat *Prospero*, home once more from her run to Battle Harbor, was rubbing her ice-sheathed side as she lay fast in her moorings. Out in mid-anchorage rode the British drill ship, *Calypso*, amid fleets of ocean and coasting steamers, and Bankers and Norwegian schooners, blue as artists' fancy-boats under the magic touch of the sun.

Past the fishermen's cottages, giving up the effort to struggle farther outward toward the harbor entrance, where the huge rock-portal shot up so sharply, the *Ulric* glided, past the box-like houses, the lines of dories afloat and ashore, the rude spruce fish sheds and the skeleton-like flakes straddling into the water.

Ahead, beyond the twisting line of Water Street, the gray-and-white city rose up like a giant amphitheater till it met the green of the spruce-trees, and down by the water-front Navista and Laurentide could see great crowds thronging the wharf as the sealer approached the docks.

"Look—look!" cried Navista. "They know—they're ready. See, there are uniformed nurses and doctors from Grenfell's Seamen's Institute!"

"And men of the drill ship, *Calypso*, with stretchers," supplemented Laurentide, catching sight of the British uniforms. "But how could they summon nurses and doctors and the *Calypso's* men so quickly? They couldn't, and though we've seen one disaster, I'm afraid—oh, I'm horribly afraid, Navista, that they have word of something we don't know about!"

"There's the harbor master in front," quavered Navista. "Listen, Ira—he's speaking!"

"Hello, the *Ulric!*" called the harbor master, through a huge megaphone. "Hello, the *Ulric!* Have you spoken the *Bellaventure?*"

"Not since Tuesday morning," bellowed Laurentide, as the steamer glided in toward the dock. "We had a full catch of over fifty thousand seals, and left the sealing-grounds yesterday."

"Then why have you your flag half-masted?"

"We have to report the wreck of the *Ile d'Argent* off Split Point last night. The *Ulric* has on board fifty-one of her dead and three living rescued from the drift-ice off Cape St. Francis."

"God rest their souls!" breathed the harbor master. "And God pity their kin!"

A GROAN went up from the throng upon the wharf. Here and there in the ranks women broke down with shrieks. There was a surge of the whole human mass toward the brink of the dock, but the St. John's police, the harbor officials and the *Calypso's* officers checked the rush and thrust the people back.

In the cleared space along the edge of the pier Laurentide could see the head surgeon of the institute giving swift directions to his nurses and attendants and the *Calypso's* men placed at his disposal.

"What of the *Bellaventure?*" he cried to the harbor master. "Why were nurses and doctors ready? Is the *Bellaventure* gone too?"

"No, it is the *Newfoundland's* crew," answered the harbor master slowly. "One hundred and twenty out of one hundred and fifty of them caught in Tuesday's blizzard on the floes. It seems that the floes they were on became separated from the main body of the ice. They drifted around helpless and confused, losing their bearings in the storm, and could not make their ship. Captain Kean tried to reach them—ay, Wesley Kean is not the man to quit—but the *Newfoundland* lay fast between two heavy floes. She's an old-style wooden ship, you recollect, and her engines hadn't the power to move her."

"Good heavens, how long—how long were they on the floes in that storm?" cried Laurentide.

"Forty-eight hours," was the answer. "Not till the weather cleared this morning could the ice-fast *Newfoundland* signal any

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of the fleet. Then she signaled the *Bellaventure* and the *Stephano* of the loss of her crew, and those powerful steel steamers smashed a way into the floes to search for Kean's men. We have it all by wireless from the *Bellaventure*, relayed from Fogo Island. Though she hasn't a full catch, the government has waived the law to let her sail again, and the owners have ordered her in."

"What is she bringing in?" asked Laurentide fearfully. "Men or—bodies?"

"There are wild reports going, but Acting-Premier Bennett has authorized a statement of the loss as sixty-four dead, and thirty-seven rescued maimed and otherwise frost-bitten. So far as we know, the *Bellaventure* has found fifty-eight dead and thirty-five living, the *Stephano* one dead and two living, and the *Florizel* five dead."

Laurentide felt Navista's figure stiffen beside him. A low, half-stifled cry escaped her, and he slipped one hand along the bridge-rail over her tightly-clutched ones in a comforting gesture.

Mutely they stood as those in a gruesome dream watching the lines being made fast, the stark bodies of the *Ile d'Argent's* men passing on stretchers from the *Ulric's* fore-deck on to the dock, and the Brunet man, the Little Miquelon man, and the man of St. Pierre, to whom Boime, Gembland and Stavenger were rendering first aid below, being carried up and rushed to the hospital on the hill.

At last Laurentide spoke, and his voice, strangely hoarse and quivery, sounded to Navista as it had sounded the day he arose with her from beside her father's couch in the *Ulric's* chart-room.

"Weeks ago I should not have understood," he breathed, "but I have seen things through your eyes, Navista, and now I understand the toll of the deep, and the will of the deep that dooms one man to stiffen on the floes and sends another home to life and—love! But Boime, Navista, great-hearted Boime, how can I ever look into his honest eyes and tell——"

"Boime knows!" boomed a big voice behind them, and they whirled, half-guiltily, to see the heavy-framed, heavy-faced, blue-sweatered, sea-booted Bonavistan at their backs.

"Boime knows," he repeated, laying his ponderous hands upon their arms, "and Boime cans forget. 'T be not my habit to open my heart this way to any living person, Laurentide, but in th' face o' disaster this be a moment to shake a man to the bottom o' his being and bare his very soul.

"So I wills not deny that I hayes loved her with a great love. And I wills not deny that I knows I haves never touched her heart. 'T be given for only one man in this world to do that for any one woman, Laurentide, and I haves seen in Navista's eyes for many days that you be that man!"

"Oh, Froude, it wasn't my fault!" cried Navista tremulously. "One can't direct the seekings of one's own heart, and the ocean brought him to me, even as it took another away!"

"Ay," nodded Boime, his craggy face seamed and ridged with emotion like the storm-engrailed face of a granite cliff, "and upon him I lays th' charge that another laid on me!"

In the silence of understanding that fell on the three, Laurentide seemed to stand once more by the *Ulric's* rail, amid a hush like the hush of the Arctic seas when the wind dies out and the frozen floes lie solid for one hundred miles.

He seemed to hear the rudder's kicking, the forefoot's rippling, the mast guys' creaking striking faint as whispers upon the mighty silent reverence of a whole ship's crew, and again he seemed to listen to Boime's words of benediction after the sea burial of Captain Clode:

" 'T be th' will o' God, and as surely as th' sun shines forth and th' tides do ebb and flow, th' law o' God shalls follow th' will o' God. Amen!"

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YOU *and* YOUR COUNTRY

ONLY a fool thinks he *knows* what the future will bring. At this writing the Army of the United States is invading Mexico for the purpose of taking Villa dead or alive, and the fools who said this country could have no more wars may possibly soon find war staring them in the face. Two years ago these same fools said the world was done with war; a few months later Europe blazed into the greatest war the world has ever known. Did it convince the fools of their folly? Would war with Mexico? Has our touch-and-go situation with Germany and with England convinced them? Did even the President's confession that one more day might bring war to us convince them that war for this country is still at least a possibility?

Nothing has or will convince them—unless some day they wake to find a foe landed on our soil, our wealth seized, our homes destroyed, our women ravished and our manhood needlessly and uselessly slaughtered by being sent into battle unprepared, untrained and unequipped.

NO, THESE fools we shall have always with us and we may as well make up our minds that we shall have to act without them.

They will be represented in Congress and other branches of our Government. Instead of leaving our fate to their stupidity, politics or pork proclivities, we, the private citizens who are aroused, must act on *our own initiative.* Our country's safety is *our* job and every patriotic American ought to help.

BUT unfortunately we have among us a worse kind of fool—the kind who realize there is always the possibility of war but who think there is no need to prepare against it. Their particularly stupid idea is that just because we are Americans we can, prepared or unprepared, lick anybody else on earth.

This brand of fools are most of them red-blooded and all of them "patriotic." They say so themselves till you are tired of hearing them. But the real diagnosis of their case is that they are suffering from the plain, common disease of "swelled head."

As to their knowledge of real facts, they have little or none. As to their reasoning power, it is a minus quantity. As to their "patriotism," it is mere jingoism. Spread-eagle oratory is no more a sign of real patriotism than a swelled head is a sign of brains, or than a loud mouth is a sign of the ability to back it up.

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WE MAY as well make up our minds that this kind of fool, as well as the other kind, is to be counted out when it comes to *doing* anything toward practical preparation, and that the rest of us shall have to work all the harder.

It may be "patriotism" to say that an American without a gun in his hand can lick a machine-gun in the hands of any other kind of man on earth, but they put people in an asylum for less than that. With nearly two years of the European war as a demonstration, any one who still thinks that Americans have a corner on bravery, that moden warfare is not decided chiefly by equipment in guns, ammunition, supplies, warships and airships, that the time to get these is after you need them instead of before, that we have enough of them now or *can get* them in time *after* we need them, or that distance protects us from invasion, well, he may be long on "patriotism" but he's short on brains and he hasn't been using what few God gave him.

YOU and I love our country as much as do any of these loud-mouthed patriots, but we know the *facts*, and the next time one of them opens up, let's jam a few down his throat: Americans have never won a war against a first-class nation. Except for the informal brush with France, we have never even fought one, except England in 1776 and 1812. In both these wars our poorly equipped and poorly trained yet brave troops outnumbered the enemy, but could not make headway against their superior equipment and training and their equal bravery. In both wars England was too busy with bigger foes to turn much of her strength against us. Only the help of France got us out of the first mess. Only luck and European complications got us out of the second mess, after we had lost every single land battle of the war except Lundy's Lane, a draw, and New Orleans, fought after declaration of peace. In both wars our country was ravaged and parts of it taken and held by the enemy. In both, our national capital was captured, and in the second it—Washington—was sacked and burned and the President of the United States made to run for his life after a smaller body of British had routed our raw troops almost at the first volley.

So much for Americans being able to lick anybody else on earth regardless of equipment, training or anything else. Maybe we can, but we only say so; we've never proved it.

WE'RE stronger now? Yes, but did mere numbers and wealth ever keep a train-robber with a gun from taking wealth from numbers?

Things have changed since then? Yes, and that makes our case worse than it was before. Then most Americans were marksmen and used to roughing it. Now they're not. Now mere bravery and numbers count for even less than they did then. Now training and equipment are a far bigger factor even than they were then, and we have comparatively less of both while other big nations have more. And now it takes longer to get them. Modern invention has made it far easier to invade us from Europe, or Asia, than it was then.

And for every step toward Preparedness we have made in the past two decades, our possible enemies have made at least a hundred.

You know, especially if you were a volunteer, that in our recent war against Spain, a fourth-rate power, our own inefficiency and unpreparedness lost us more American lives and money than did the bullets of the enemy. But this pitiful "patriotic" fool sees only that "we licked 'em, didn't we?" Yes, we licked 'em. But because I can spank a child it doesn't follow that I can lick a grown man.

THERE is a third fool whose help we can not count on in making our country safe—the fool who says merely "War is horrible. We don't want it. It takes two to make a quarrel. We won't have it." War *is* horrible—an unutterably stupid method of settling disputes, criminally expensive in lives and property and human happiness. Only a fool or a devil *wants* war. But the world continues to have war. And it does *not* take two to make a quarrel. Nor can Americans keep off war merely by condemning it, wishing it away and refusing to prepare against it. Not in this day; nor can a wealthy man bring on the millenium by going unarmed in the midst of armed robbers.

THESE three kinds of fool comprise a fair-sized portion of our population and are making a noise and exerting an

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influence out of proportion to their numbers. They will not help make the country safe. The Government is proving hopelessly inadequate to the task. It is up to the rest of us American citizens, and we'll have to work overtime.

1. What is to be done?
2. How shall we do it?

To start things I'll state my own platform. Some of you will differ on some points. Being united on the main point of greater preparedness, each of us can find in the list that follows later certain things to *do* that will fit his own particular beliefs and circumstances.

Read my platform and then state your own to yourself with equal definiteness:

(1) A first line of defense a thousand miles out from our coasts—a navy at least second among the navies of the world, with full complement of scout cruisers, destroyers, submarines, hydroplanes and aeroplanes, transports, supply, tender and hospital ships, etc., with a sufficiently large personnel, strong enough not only to protect us, but to maintain the Monroe Doctrine and to uphold the principles of humanity we stand for throughout the world.

(2) A Council for National Defense consisting of the Secretaries of State, War and the Navy, the chairmen of the Congressional Committees on Appropriations, Foreign Affairs, Military Affairs and Naval Affairs, the Chief of the General Staff of the Army, and the Chief of the General Staff of the Navy (this last to be provided for by legislation), a single controlling body with power to act and knowing the nation's resources, needs and foreign relations.

Until the above is attained I strongly advocate a *volunteer citizen National Defense Committee*, nonpartisan and composed of such prominent men as ex-Secretaries Root, Wright, Dickinson, Stimson, Charles Edward Russell, etc. There are enough strong Defense advocates to furnish all the money and free services needed for the actual work of centralizing and coördinating *all* Defense movements, organizations and citizens and to direct their activities toward the points where they are most needed. The Committee's first work would be to distribute broadcast a Defense Information Directory, an improved edition of the one that follows in this article.

Also, until the Council is attained, measures to make Congress heed the recommendations of the technical experts of the General Board of the Navy and the General Staff of the Army who *know* what is needed. Which Congress does *not*.

(3) Greater protection for the Panama Canal, whose loss would cut our Navy's efficiency in two and double that of the enemy.

(4) Greatly increased coast-defense, including carefully planned railway consolidation.

(5) The strongest air fleet in the world.

(6) Universal compulsory military training along the lines of the Swiss or Australian plans, beginning in the schools, ending for the most part at the age of 23, and taking as little as possible of the citizens' time. *Until* this is attained, the following *substitutes:*

(*a*) A standing Army large enough to maintain at least 250,000 men in continental United States.

(*b*) Adequate Reserves for Army, Navy and Marine Corps.

(*c*) More West Points. More Naval Academies. Present military courses in State Universities and other colleges made practically equal to that at West Point.

(*d*) Many Plattsburg Camps throughout the country, preferably maintained by the Government. Also school camps.

(*e*) Rifle clubs in every town and district.

(*f*) A *really* Federalized militia and naval militia, with their reserves, not liable to strike duty, controlled by the National Government only, and subject to the President's call for service anywhere. Only an amendment of the U. S. Constitution can establish this; present efforts of Congress are chiefly futile.

(*g*) Citizens trained by every other possible method.

(7) Maintenance at all times of an adequate amount of up-to-date arms and ammunition for all men trained for war.

(8) Establishment of an Industrial Reserve that can mobilize the men skilled in trades and professions necessary to modern warfare into a civilian army ready for instant service.

(9) Organization of all industries producing supplies needed in war-time, in coöperation with the Government, so that they can go to work like a big machine.

I AM an extremist? Yes, I am extreme in my regard for my country and for the institutions and principles she stands for. So much so that I think they're worth protecting very carefully. An alarmist? So was Noah. A militarist? No. I have never met any one—any American—who wished this country to be militarized to the extent found in some European countries. All the things in my platform would leave us a great distance from such militarism as that. Australia and Switzerland are as democratic as we, yet they have compulsory military training. Actual reports from men who have had compulsory military service in State universities show that it tends to *decrease* rather than increase their militaristic spirit.

HOWEVER, every intelligent man has a right to his honest opinion. The main point is that each of us wants some degree of more adequate preparedness. In the following list each will find one or more things that *he* can do and that are in accord with his own particular views. And

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right here I want to say that one of the things the Preparedness campaign needs most is a more complete and fuller list like the one I give here, to be distributed broadcast throughout the country, showing every man what *he* can *do* and *just how* he can do it. Too much of the present literature on Defense results only in making people sorer over our lack of preparation without telling them how they can *do* something to set things right.

READ the following and when you find a thing you approve and can do, do it! Talking Defense helps some, but acting it helps more.

(1) Write your Representative and your two Senators in Congress, urging them to whatever degree of Preparedness you believe in. Write also to President Wilson, Secretary Daniels and Secretary Baker. Such letters *do* count.

(2) Write Defense letters to the newspapers.

(3) Urge others to do things in this list.

(4) Read "Self-Helps for the Citizen Soldier," by Captains Moss and Stewart of the U. S. Army. ($1.25. Address George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wisconsin, or U. S. Infantry Association, Washington, D. C.) Invaluable for any one interested in Defense, or who may some day be called to arms, even if he already has some training and military knowledge. Chapters on Militia, Student Camps, Business Men's Camps, How a Battle is Fought, Rifle Clubs, Practical Hints for Self-Preparation, Our Defenses, The Making of a Fighting Man, etc. Read "Fundamentals of Military Service," compiled by Capt. Lincoln C. Andrews under supervision of Major-General Leonard Wood. (J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, Pa.) Read "The Military Unpreparedness of the United States: A History of American Land Forces from Colonial Times until June 1, 1915," by Frederic Louis Huidekoper. (Macmillan Co., 64 Fifth Ave., New York. $4.)

(5) Send your son to a State University or other college where he can get military training along with his general education. Use your influence to make these military courses more adequate.

(6) Join the American Legion, founded by us of the Camp-Fire. (No connection with the 97th Canadian Overseas Battalion known by the same name.) Pledges you to active service only on call for volunteers from U. S. Government. Two branches: 1. Men who have military or naval training or experience. 2. Men trained in any one of over 80 trades or professions needed in war-time —railroad men, aviators, chauffeurs, mechanics, doctors, etc. No obligation that can not be canceled by a simple letter or resignation before actual enlistment under the Government itself. Members cross-indexed and catalogued as to all qualifications, measured for uniforms, shoes, etc.; will save much vital time in a crisis. Each man serves where and how the Government may need him. Quickest way for a volunteer to get to the front. Amounts to the Reserve this country doesn't possess. 25 cents admission; badge 25 cents. Address 10 Bridge St., New York City.

(7) Join the National Security League and support it with work and money. Its work is one of propaganda—to show the public the dangers of unpreparedness and the economy of proper defense. Address 31 Pine St., New York City.

(8) Join the American Red Cross. Register with it for service. Contribute to it. It has officially endorsed Preparedness because Preparedness means fewer wounded. Address American Red Cross, Washington, D. C.

(9) Contribute to the National Aeroplane Fund and help buy aeroplanes and train aviators for the National Guard and naval militia. The United States is said to be less well equipped in aircraft than is Morocco! Address National Aeroplane Fund, care Aero Club, 297 Madison Ave., New York City.

(10) If you own an automobile, join the Automobile Club of America, 247 West 54th St., New York City; or join the Aero Club of America, 297 Madison Ave., New York City; or the United Power Boat Squadron, 121 Beverly St., Boston, Mass., and help in their work for Defense. Or join one of their clubs in other cities.

(11) If an engineer, join the American Institute of Consulting Engineers, 35 Nassau St., New York; American Society of Mechanical Engineers, American Institute of Mining Engineers, American Institute of Electrical Engineers, all at 25 West 39th St., New York, or the similar societies for Aeronautic and Radio Engineers, and help in their work for Defense.

(12) Join or organize a Student Camp. Camps organized by War Department to give a splendid four weeks' course, under Army officers, in military training—infantry, field artillery, cavalry, engineer and signal corps. Government lends free cots, blankets, tentage, cooking outfit and complete soldier equipment. Board $3.50 per week. Members furnish uniforms and clothes; must be U. S. citizens, 5 ft. 4 in. or over, between 18 and 45 (older in special cases), good moral character, physically qualified, of good standing in classes, students in universities, colleges, last year of high school, or graduates of same, or of *equivalent* education. No future obligation entailed. Address Officer in Charge of Camps, Governors Island, New York.

(13) Join or organize a Business Man's Camp. Camps give fundamental education of an officer to business and professional men of college or *equivalent* education. Other conditions same as for Student Camps. Local chambers of commerce and newspapers will often coöperate in getting a Camp for their city or district. Address Officer in Charge of Inspection Camps, Governors Island, N. Y.

(14) Organize or join a rifle-club in your city, district, school or college. Ten or more male citizens between 16 and 45 can form a club anywhere

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in U. S. or its possessions and, by adopting the required by-laws, affiliate with the National Rifle Association of America and thereby be entitled to rifles and 120 rounds of ammunition per man per year issued under a nominal bond by the War Department, along with special rates and privileges in purchasing Government arms, ammunition and club equipment. By-laws, complete instructions for forming and maintaining a club, and much instruction in shooting furnished by the Association, which numbers some 1,000 clubs. Annual medal is presented to each club for competition. Address National Rifle Association of America, 1502 H St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

(15) Join the Army League or Navy League. Most of their members are civilians. Both have a Woman's Section. What these two Leagues—and most other Defense societies—want is to make Congress pay attention to the recommendations of the General Staff of the Army and the General Board of the Navy, composed of trained experts who *know* our military and naval *necessities*, which Congress does *NOT*. (Congress would make an almost equally intelligent showing if it tried to tell the doctors how to cure diphtheria or cancer, or an electrician how to build a dynamo.) The Navy League wants "A navy second to none," with *just* the kind of equipment recommended by the Board. The Army League wants an adequate Regular Army, Organized Militia and Reserves. Both Leagues especially want Congress to pass a bill that's been before it for *over six years* to establish a Council for National Defense consisting of the President, the Secretaries of State, War and the Navy, with corresponding chairmen and technical experts, acting *all together* as a *unit* which would treble efficiency and cut down expense. A similar Council, with the similar personel I have embodied in my personal platform given above, is perhaps more strongly favored. Address Navy League, Southern Building, Washington, D. C., or its branches in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia; dues $2. Address Army League, Metropolitan Bank Building, Washington, D. C.; dues $1.

(16) Investigate and use Sherwood M. Hard's method of teaching manual of arms and everything a soldier must learn before he can be handled in company formation, including care of feet, camp duties, ballistics, mechanism, care and use of rifles and other arms, etc. This system, a combination of still and moving pictures, phonograph commands and direction, and printed text, has been strongly endorsed by practically all Army authorities including ex-Secretary (then Secretary) Garrison and officers of the General Staff. It gives absolute standardization, is capable of shortening the period of fitting a volunteer army for the field by about two months (a vital point), can be easily used by men no one of whom has any knowledge of military matters (thereby going far to meet our dangerous lack of officers for training recruits), and, since it requires only a spare hour from one or more evenings a week, is of exceptional value to men unable to take time for militia or camp training, and will be wonderfully useful in supplementing Summer camp training, since it carries the work on throughout the year, holds the men or boys together and almost doubles the extent of instruction possible for a camp. It will undoubtedly be universally used by both Army and Militia. A complete outfit can be purchased or rented by a town or group of towns. Chambers of Commerce will often coöperate and owners of moving-picture halls frequently give them rent free at certain hours. Films have been made from regular Army soldiers under supervision of regular Army officers who have volunteered to aid this work. Only a perfect drill is permitted to be reproduced. For cost and full particulars address Sherwood M. Hard, 30 Church St., New York City.

(17) Join and support the National School Camp Association. Use your influence to get it State and Federal support. It organizes schoolboys of 12 years or more for industrial and military training—boys in school as Student Cadets, boys who have completed the grammar grades as Apprentice Cadets. Employers of the country will be organized to give these boys positions, under an equitable apprenticeship system, so they will learn trades that will furnish them a good livelihood in time of peace and benefit the nation in time of war. Keeps boys off the street and gives a clean substitute for the "gang" evils, improving them in body, mind and morals. Apprentice Cadets will spend two evenings a week in study and one in military drill, graduating in 5 years as thorough workmen and trained soldiers. In July and August 2 weeks to 2 months in camp, tents free, mess 20 cents a day, boys furnishing uniform and mess-kit (at a cost of $3 to $4). Dues, 10c a month. A camp for 15,000 boys on Staten Island, N. Y., for July and August, is arranged and is being rapidly recruited. Address National School Camp Association, 1 Broadway, New York.

(18) Do your utmost to make Congress adopt the carefully worked-out plan of Martin J. Gillen, of the Mitchell Wagon Company, or some similar plan, for industrial coördination and mobilization, so that, if war comes, necessary supplies can be produced at once without the delay, confusion and loss that would otherwise ensue, and so that the Government can not be robbed by excessive prices. *This is a vital matter.* Particularly if you are a manufacturer, write at once to Martin J. Gillen, Mitchell Wagon Co., Racine, Wisconsin.

(19) Join or support a citizens' secret service. The U. S. S. S. is excellent, but not to be compared in numbers with those of foreign countries. The service needs to be increased many times—all the more if war comes. It may even prevent war. Nearly a year ago in "Camp-Fire" I suggested such a volunteer secret service, our readers being particularly valuable agents for the purpose since they reach all the odd corners of the earth and are of all walks of life. One of you who wrote in response knew of a similar organization in England and strongly advocated it here. As a result, by the time you read this the organization may have come into being, with unofficial endorsement from Government authorities and with arrangements for coöperation with the U. S. Secret Service. Its service will be to receive and sift reports from members, gradually sifting the members themselves, and passing to the U. S. S. S. only what reports seem worth attention. Only clerical help will be paid, executives and agents giving free service. If it materializes, support it with work and money. In the meantime address Carl Anderson, Times Square, New York.

(20) Join the United States Army, Navy or Marine Corps, or even the Militia. The present Mili-

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tia (also the "Federalized" Militia proposed by Congress) is a miserable makeshift—48 separate little armies without real Federal control, incompletely trained. The system is to blame, not the men who have enlisted in it to serve their country. If you can't get better training elsewhere (compare number of hours actual training in the 4 weeks of a Plattsburg camp with the number of hours actual training in a year with Militia), join it, get what training you can from it, help prevent U. S. Government funds from being squandered and work to have the Militia freed from strike duty and eventualy *really* Federalized, which can be done *only* by an amendment of the U. S. Constitution.

(21) Send a dime or more for each of your children or grandchildren, or contribute yourself to the New York *Tribune* or any paper in your district collecting for the Marjorie Sterrett battle-ship *America*—a fund started by a little girl in Brooklyn. A badge is generally sent as a receipt.

(22) If none of the other methods of volunteering for service in case of war fits your circumstances and wishes, join the Gray-Headed Regiment, the Redheads, or a similar organization. The former requires previous military experience and is for men over 45 who are still hale enough for garrison or active service. Address, for Grayheads, Major Guillermo MacFergus, care *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City; for Redheads, Fred C. Adams, Chatham, N. Y.

(23) Get what will profit you and the country from the following list of books, taken from a list compiled by Generals Scott and Wood of the Army. Address, Chief of War College Division, General Staff, Washington, D. C.

Cavalry Drill Regulations, 1902, 40c; Cavalry Service Regulations (Experimental), 1914, 30c; Coast Artillery, 1914, 30c; Field Artillery, Horse and Light, Provisional, 1911, 30c; Field Artillery, for 4.7" Gun, Provisional, 1914, 15c; Mountain Artillery, Provisional, 1908, 35c; Infantry, 1911, corrected to November, 1913, 20c; Machine-Gun Platoon, Infantry, 1909, 18c; Machine-Gun Platoon, Cavalry, 1914, 6c; Saber Exercises, 1914, 20c; Sanitary Troops, 1914, 30c; Signal Corps Field Companies, 1911, 30c; Courts-Martial, 30c; Engineer, Field, 1912, 78c; Interior Guard Duty, 1914, 15c; Military Railways, 1910, 43c; Noncommissioned Officers and Privates, Organized Militia and Volunteers, 1914, 20c; Small Arms Firing, 1913, 21c; Field Firing and Proficiency Test, 1911, 7c; Rules of Land Warfare, 1914, 35c; Uniform, 1914, 5c; Soldiers' Handbook, 1913, 12c; Ballistics (Hamilton), 00c; Field Sanitation (Wilson), 1912, $1.00; Infantry Tactics, Seventy Problems in (Morrison), 1914, $2.00; Maps for above, $1.25; Map Maneuvers and Tactical Rides (Sayre), 1912, $1.25; Mess Officers' Assistant (Holbrook), 1911, 83c; Elements of Military Hygiene (Ashburn), 1909, $1.00; Military Map Reading (Sherrill), 1912, 75c; Military Maps Explained (Eames), 1909, 82c; Military Topography for the Mobile Forces (Sherrill), 1912, $2.00; Notes on Field Fortification (Army Field Engr. School), 10c; Provisioning of a Modern Army in the Field (Sharpe), 2d Edition, 1908, $1.23; Rapid Reconnaissance Sketching (Sherrill), 3d Edition, 1912, $1.05; Soldier's Foot and Military Shoe (Munson), 1912, 90c; Tactical Principles and Problems (Hanna), 4th Edition, 1913, $2.50; Technique of Modern Tactics (Bond and McDonough), 1913, $2.15.

(24) Work to have *true* United States history taught in the schools instead of the present sugar-coated text-books, so that American children will know the *facts*—that our past is not all glorious and that we have in other wars paid bitterly for unpreparedness. Join the National Society for the Advancement of Patriotic Education, Room 2002, Forty-Second Street Building, New York City, organized to "foster practical patriotism, efficiency and idealism." Contribute. Membership free. Ask them for a free copy of "Some Facts of American History." It will open your eyes. Here is one particularly important thing and it is the duty of even a pacifist to do it.

(25) Put the "Wyoming Plan" into operation in your state or district. It provides military training, with the consent of school boards, as part of the regular school curriculum. It is in force in Wyoming, endorsed by the woman State Superintendent of Public Instruction, by military authorities, etc., and doing splendid work for the boys, physically, mentally and morally. For full information address the originator of the plan, Lieutenant E. Z. Steever, War College Division of the General Staff, Washington, D. C.

(26) Secure from the National Guard the use of their armories in off hours for military drill and training for citizens not members of the Guard.

(27) If you have only money to give, or money as well as services, or if you are a woman, pay, or help pay, the expense of sending some one else to a Student Camp or of giving him military training by some other method.

(28) If a woman, join the American Woman's League for Self-Defense. "Clearly woman can not rely upon man to save her in war-time; she must find her defense, as she finds her danger, solely within herself." "Our object is to train women physically, mentally, morally, how to be strong. How to defend themselves from aggression. To promote peace, to urge upon Congress the necessity of Preparedness, which will mean peace, a mutual helpfulness among women of all classes." "We intend to create regiments of trained, efficient soldier girls for self-defense in case of need—powerful, resourceful bodies of women, able not only to protect themselves, but those of their sex who for various reasons are unable to do so." Actual military drill has already been begun. Enrolment $1; annual dues $1. Address the Secretary, American Woman's League for Self-Defense, 33 W. 42nd St., New York.

(29) At the next primaries and election, and at all future ones, vote against every Congressman or other public official, regardless of party, who has put self-interest, local interest, pork or politics ahead of patriotism, so that he may never again be given an office of trust by the country he has betrayed.

Certainly among the above you will find more than one thing *you* can *do* to further the cause of Defense. Do them!

ARTHUR S. HOFFMAN.

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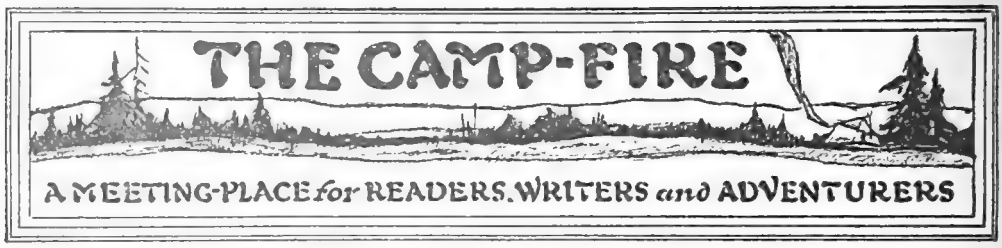

WILLIAM H. HAMBY follows Camp-Fire custom with his first story in *Adventure*, and introduces himself to us. "The Harp on a Barbed Wire Fence" is not, however, as most of you know, his first story in print. Please note, any of you who still cherish the old delusion that a writer must have "pull" to get into the magazines, that Mr. Hamby has published nearly 2,000,000 words of fiction without ever seeing an editor. He's seeing them now, it happens, for he's in New York on his way to Bermuda or the West Indies. Me, among others, for he happened to get on my commuting train the other evening, in tow of Homer Croy, and I was introduced to him.

He has done most of his writing in the Ozark Mountains where he grew up as a boy, among a people to whom "adventure was as common—and as little thought of—as spring-water."

My earliest recollections were of tragedy. Our mountain neighbors were Kentucky, Tennessee and Carolina mountaineers. It was as natural for them to fight as to eat side-meat. They would swear they were the most peaceable people on earth—and they were when they were not fighting. And yet, a dance, a circus or circuit-court week hardly ever passed without somebody getting badly hurt. They would fight over an argument on whether the earth was round or flat, fight over the price of three rabbits, fight over a lifted inflection at the end of a question.

ONE night I was returning from a country dance. It was dark, and I was alone. I was seventeen years old, and carried a .44 Colts. It was the custom—also a necessity.

I saw two horses in the road—standing. Then oaths—and a struggle. I ran forward, knowing what was happening. Jim —— had Bill —— down and was in the act of cutting his throat when I got hold of him. When I got him off I had to stand him up in front of my gun before I could reason with him.

"Jim, what in the —— are you doing that for? Don't you know they'd hang you?" I asked wrathfully.

"He called me a liar!" said Jim, still foaming with rage, "and I'll cut his —— heart out!"

"What did he call you a liar about?" I questioned.

"He said I said Little George hadn't washed his neck in three years. And I said I didn't say it, and he said I lied."

"Well"—I studied a moment on what sort of judgment to render—"I don't want to butt into nobody's fight, but it's a fact that Little George hasn't washed his neck, or any further down, in thirteen years."

"Of course he hain't," admitted Jim, "but I hain't said he hain't!"

"Well, you've said it now," I laughed, "and you fellows shake hands and go on."

They did, grinning, and rode off the best of friends.

I LEARNED early in the game that no man can really write what he has not lived—at least, in part. My ambition early ran to business adventures—I've always had a keen interest in all sorts of business conflicts—especially the everlasting conflict of the man without a dollar who fights against all sorts of odds. Through Kansas wheatfields, the plains of the Indian Territory, among the gold-miners of Colorado, and the lead-mines of Joplin, I learned both the game of the man at the bottom with a rake or pick, and of the man at the top who must fight competition and meet the bills. I love the conflict of business, and instead of making men sordid, I believe, if the game is played square and a man keeps up his sympathy for the fellow under him, it develops one of the finest types of man the world has ever known.

NEW BLOOD IN AMERICAN LEGION

THROUGH its own new official organ, the *Legion Call*, and through other channels, the good news has already reached most of you that the American Legion has taken a fresh start and begun an active campaign that will accomplish during this year several times the good work done in its first twelve months.

At the annual meeting of Advisory (voting) Members at New York, March 14, the sentiment was overwhelmingly for abandonment of the past non-publicity methods and for pushing the work in far more vigorous fashion. The meeting was marked by its earnest enthusiasm and, better still, by its "pull together" spirit. Election of officers was quickly and satisfactorily disposed of, a brief discussion showed complete accord on general policies, and the formal

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meeting was suddenly transformed into a working body that went to work on the spot.

THE former Council remains as before, composed of the two ex-Presidents of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft, and former Secretaries of State, War and Navy, Elihu Root, Jacob M. Dickinson, Henry L. Stimson, Luke E. Wright, George von L. Meyer, Truman H. Newberry, Charles J. Bonaparte. One of the former Directors, Julien T. Davies, Jr., being incapacitated by ill health, the six other Directors were unanimously reëlected and the Board increased to 15 instead of 7 by a unanimous vote, by the addition of the following new Directors: Roy D. Jones, Boston, vice-president; Nelson Lloyd, Syosset, L. I., treasurer; Dr. John I. Hausmann, New York, secretary; Samuel Wesley Long, Wilmington, Del., Charles H. Frost, Plainfield, New Jersey; Henry C. Walsh, Frederick Trevor Hill, Courtland Smith, Wm. T. Hornaday, all of New York. Alexander M. White was unanimously reëlected president.

Directors are chosen from the general vicinity of New York so that they can be counted on to attend personally the frequent meetings of the Board, but one of the new policies of the Legion will be to transfer as much authority as possible to duly chosen State or local organizers.

THE Legion will give special attention to its Special Service branch, covering 83 civilian trades and professions vitally needed in modern war. You will be seeing its blue star on a white field with a red border a good deal more often than in the past, for the American Legion is going to be one of the country's biggest and most practical resources in case of war—a big machine ready to act at once when general confusion and turmoil will be going on all around it and when hours are worth ordinary months.

Join it. Get others to join it. The Legion was originated and brought into being by us of the Camp-Fire, therefore we, most of all, should give it our time, energy and influence. And you owe it to your country.

THROUGH Camp-Fire and letters we're serving you in many ways. Help *us* by not asking things already covered by our Information Directory. Before writing, glance through it.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

W. C. TUTTLE'S story in this issue is not his first in *Adventure*—nor his last, but his second, and now's the time that he introduces himself to us. The delay is mine, for his letter was written last Fall.

As far as I am concerned, adventure has sidestepped me almost entirely. I was born at Glendive, Montana Territory, thirty-one years ago, and my first impressions of life were the popping of pistols and the rattle of long-horn cattle as they came down the street. My love of adventure and the open was inherited from my father, H. C. (Hank) Tuttle, who has lived most of his life outdoors and who is spoken of as "the deadest shot and the coolest long-distance walker in Montana." When I was twelve he took me out behind the barn and taught me how to hold a 45-70. I got my first deer a few weeks later, and I've been throwing lead ever since.

NEVER was further east than Glendive, Mont. Have spent all my life in Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Kept books, railroaded, worked on street-cars, cattle and sheep, relief forest-ranger, cigar business, harness and saddlery salesman, northern express clerk, farmed, prospected and worked in mines—studied mining, trapped, hunted and then degenerated into taking a position as staff artist on a newspaper. Any one wishing to trade a 30-30 Winchester for a drawing easel can apply to me.

Of course there have been some exciting incidents in even such a prosaic existence, but not worth fussing over.

A great part of my life has been spent with such characters as I have tried to write about in that story. I had a blow-pipe and a few chemicals, when I was over there, and on Sunday the old sourdoughs would bring down their rock and get a crude analysis. I only wish I had that chance again to get real local color!

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Have a lot of good friends among the Indians—especially the Piegans (Blackfeet). Can *wawa* Chinook enough to get eats in any wigwam in the West.

TODAY I yelled like a Comanche, when I saw that Gowdy made his home-run in the tenth, and eventually beat the Athletics. Three of "Our Own Boys" are with Boston, James, Whaling, Mann and Strand—Northwestern league—so you see we have a license to yell. I think this will be about all you can stand at one time, so will put on the drag. —WILBUR COLEMAN TUTTLE.

P. S. To my friends I am known as "Tut"—that goes for *Adventure*, as I'm one of the folks now.

TUT.

AN AMERICAN in the French Foreign Legion, to whom I had, at his request, sent data on our American Legion, writes the following letter. (Quite a number of Americans in European trenches, impressed at first-hand with what modern war means, and with the tremendous importance of preparing adequately in advance, have written back to join the American Legion, and thus do their share toward building up defense for their own country.)

January 31, 1916.

I have read often, since the movement for preparedness started, of the knocks and the praise for the American Legion and it galls me to know that there are those who, dreamers that they are, see little or no use in awakening to the fact that, man or nation, it's the one which has the force behind the punch which can protect its home. One can't dream battles: one has to up and fight them.

I BELIEVE that "experience is the best of teachers," but if Americans can't learn, from the experience of the nations over here, the lesson of preparedness, then they will live to be sorry sufferers for waiting to learn the lesson from their own experience later. Had France and England been prepared, the Germans would have kept on running at the Marne.

We American "adventurers" here in this conflict know what preparedness means and we appreciate the friendship and well wishes of those of our country who also realize what it means.—EDMOND C. C. GENET, ESQ., Regiment d' Marche d' la Legion Etrangère, 1er B'n., 4ième Cie. Secteur postal 109, France.

EXTRACTS from two letters from G. H. Blenck, up in Ontario, cover a wide sweep of adventuring, and add another item to our list of strange prices paid for a copy of *Adventure*, or of strange adventures of a copy:

I have been in the West but have traveled quite a bit in the East—England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, Norway, Sweden, Egypt. I have also been up in Ungava and all out the Hudson's Bay district, also the mining camps of Porcupine, Cobalt, Elk Lake, Gowganda, Coppercliff. I am by choice a prospector and have some fairly good claims (gold) near Porcupine.

I WAS through the big fire which wiped out several small towns and several mines on July 11, 1911. We had a narrow escape, being in the water for three hours. The water, I might add, was quite warm when the fire struck the town, and when we came out after the fire had died down somewhat, the water was very cold. Several Americans, some of whom I knew, were drowned or burned that day. I may say I never met a finer lot of men in my life. I helped bring some of them in, poor fellows.

I might add that the most I paid for a copy of *Adventure* (new) was 50c up North, although in Porcupine I never had any trouble in obtaining my copy at the regular price.

I SPENT three years, interesting years, I might say, in a crack English Cavalry regiment—21st Lancers (Empress of India's), but of course I have not seen active service. I tried to re-enlist and failed. I am now making shells. I have been a constable, cook, lumberjack, miner, prospector, timekeeper on construction, bridge-builder, fire-ranger, and I am now trying to get a position on the moving-picture stage.

IF INTERESTED in America's future safety, read the article just preceding "Camp-Fire."

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care U. S. Consul, Para, Brazil. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary. (Five cents postage in this case.)

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., $1.00.

National School Camp Ass'n; address its Sec'y., 1 Broadway, New York.

Red-Headed Regiment, Fred C. Adams, Chatham, N. Y.

Gray-Headed Regiment, address Major Guillermo MacFergus, care *Adventure*.

Marine Corps Gazette, 24 E. 23rd St., New York.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

PARTNER, to go on trapping trip this Fall, with intentions of starting fur farm in North. Must be fair disposition and temperate habits. Must know something of fur-bearing animals and their habits. Man with money and woodcraft experience preferred. Looks like good money proposition; fur-bearing animals getting scarcer every year. Also anxious to get more information regarding location or law of fur farming.—Address M. W. 321, care *Adventure*, New York City.

PARTNER, to go with me through Florida, Cuba, S. America, and Central America. Must be able to rough it when necessary. Prefer age 20 to 30 years. Maybe a chance for a few thousand dollars if hint I've received turns out O. K. Will make more than expenses as we go. Write quick, stating all.—Address R. S. EDMISTON, Box 118, Quitman, Miss.

PARTNER, with $200 capital for a motor-cycle trip from New York to Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. Motor-cycle, side car, camping outfit, etc., will be furnished by me. Exciting trip guaranteed. Will start July or August. —Address WALTER B. RAYNOR, 151 E. Main Street, Patchogue, N. Y.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER, not German nor Swede, to trap with me next fall. I have good outfit, but he will have to pay share of expense—$10 or $15 a month covering everything. I am an old-timer in the business. We will trap in the West. —Address FRANK H. HUSTON, P. O. St. Helena, Calif.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

SPENCER, ALMA, of England, who married a man named Barlow, the whereabouts of whom are also unknown. Two children were born. Later, Alma Spencer Barlow married Otto H. Keimling (date unknown). At that time Keimling wrote his wife's people in England of the marriage, and they came to America and took back the two Barlow children with them. Three Keimling children were born. If the oldest had lived she would have been 24 last September. Mrs. Keimling (Alma Spencer) died fourteen years ago. Mr. Keimling died last March. Two children survive.

They are anxious to know about their mother's family; who the Spencers of England are, and to get in touch with their grandparents, if still alive.—Address L. T. 322.

COUGHLIN, DR. JEREMIAH, last heard of him was that he had opened a school for English literature in Bogota, Colombia. He was interested in mining. Born Marquette, Mich., where he graduated from college. In 1886 received appointment from President Cleveland as Consul and Secretary of Legation to U. S. of Colombia, S. A. Held post until election President Harrison. Resident of N. Y. C.—Address STEPHEN MCMAHON, 616 Sixty-First St., Bay Ridge, Bklyn., N. Y.

POOLE, CHARLES W., sailor, engineer. Was on salmon steamers plying between 'Frisco, Seattle and Alaska. Also was with "Tom Corwin" expedition and on missionary ship *Morning Star*. All this service between years 1877 and 1900. Would like to hear from his shipmates or friends.—Address L. T. 319, care *Adventure*, New York City.

HANSER, EDWARD, last heard of Globe, Arizona. Was working as a sub-contractor for the Pacific Light & Power Co. and for Southern Sierra Power Co. During 1910 and 1911 was working in California, water-piping. Next 16th of April will be 31 years. Dark hair, fair complexion, about 5 ft. Was at one time working for Government at Pathfinder, Wyo.—Address J. G. HANSER, 437 S. Center St., Casper, Wyo.

OWEN, G. P., last heard of with French army (mechanician in aviator squadron). Native of Maine. Formerly Gunner's Mate U. S. N. Inventor of sight adjuster for naval guns. Wounded in fight with Captain Emelio Alapap in Philippines. Wanted in regard to property in Manila.—Address KING & KING, Washington, D. C.

LOOMIS, JOHNNY, last heard from Vacaville, California, headed for Sacramento, California, July 27, 1908. Was taking race-horses to Sacramento, in the employ of Lesly Gailbraith, Oakland, California. 21 years, small blue eyes, dark hair.—Address MRS. EVA LOOMIS, 2002 East Washington St., Portland, Oregon.

MARINE, COLONEL CHAS. A., please let me hear from you at once, important. Would like to hear from old comrades of "A" Co. under Col. Duan Cabral during the Madero Revolution. — Address GUY M. SHEPHERD, Bisbee, Ariz.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the July and January issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

FLOYD, NORRIS, last heard from Chicago, Ill., and Toledo, Ohio. Formerly train despatcher for Tremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley R. R. at Verdigree and Niobrara, Nebraska. Had son, Donald, about fourteen years. Wife's name "Tess."—Address B. L. CASEY, 3357 So. Oakley Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

CONLEY, MARK FRANCIS, from home three years, and have heard no word from him. Dark-brown hair, light skin, blue eyes, 5 ft., 150 lbs. Mother expects to hear from him.—Address KATE BRASEL, 233 Tremont St., Boston, Mass.

TREVOR, ROLAND (Scotty), discharged from the U. S. Army early part of 1914. Heard he had reënlisted in 13th U. S. Inf. Pete Edwards would like to get in touch with him.—Address E. G. WELCH, 126001 Machine-Gun Section, 71st Batt., C. E. F., Woodstock, Ont., Canada.

REILLY, JOHN A., left Baltimore Sept., 1894. Last heard from Kansas City, Mo. Somewhere in Texas. Height 5 ft., brown hair, blue eyes. Mother must see you before she dies. Please write.—Address C. W. WICKS, 1303 Ensor St., Baltimore, Md.

RAVEN, FRANK A., last heard of hospital in Me., care St. Croix Paper Co., Me. Electrical engineer, under Klapp & Parcel, New York City, Horne, White Plains, N. Y. Was in Hamilton, Ont., 1911-12.—Address J. H. POLLIARD, care *Adventure*.

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COWELL, J. GORDON. Charles Ashleigh would like to hear from Cowell, who accompanied him on a walking trip across South America. We started from Buenos Aires on January 3, 1912. In May, 1912, I proceeded north up the Chilean coast, leaving Cowell in Valparaiso, from where he intended to journey in a sailing ship to Australia. Australian and Canadian papers please copy.—Address CHARLES ASHLEIGH, care *Adventure*.

DOWNING, FLORA F. Sinclair's daughter Ruth wants any of her relatives to write to her, as she has news for them and needs them. Am married.—Address MRS. RUTH B. SMITH, 1113 Minneapolis, Wichita, Kansas.

COMRADES serving in Company I of the 40th U. S. Volunteers would do me a great favor by dropping me a line, as it is important.—Address CLYDE SMITH, Palmdale, Calif.

MORRIS, FRANK (G. N. Lineman), last heard of in Gt. Falls, Mont., 1914. Friends would like to hear from him.—Address EWEN MOORE, Laclede, Idaho.

STARLIGHT, CAPTAIN, formerly of H. T. Coy. Kindly communicate with your companion in the adventure of Sands the "Hair-Pin Curve."—Address L. T. 318, care *Adventure*.

MCARDLE, JAMES, last heard of Feb. 17, 1911, stopping at the "Gate City Hotel," Maricopa, Calif.—Address RICHARD TAMPLIN, 78 Powers St., Bklyn., N. Y.

ALLEN, CALVIN J., pal, last heard of in Suisum, California, 1911. Formerly of Chicago, Illinois.—Address E. LESLIE SCHELL, Ancon, Canal Zone.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SCHWERIN, WILLIAM H., last heard from about two years ago at Fort George, British Columbia. Age 27, height 5 ft., red hair.—Address GILFORD J. SCHWERIN, 364 Sixty-first St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

MOORE, WILLIAM, last seen Seattle, Wash., Spring, 1908, known as Billy Moore or "Kyak Bill."—Address FRANK M. FORBES, 700 Seventh Avenue, Peoria, Ill.

OWENS, CLYDE, last heard of Indianapolis, Ind., 1907. Would like to know the whereabouts of him and his brothers, William, Oscar, Fisher Clyde Perry and Demus. —Address G. Z. BRYTON, care *Adventure*.

YARBROUGH, LAWRENCE SEVEN (Bonnie), last heard from Joplin, Mo., 12 years ago. Brother and baby sister want you. Write to sister.—Address BLANCHE YARBROUGH ANDERSON, R. 2 Box 106, Whittier, Cal.

OTT, CHARLES, sailed from Hamburg ten years ago for New York. Was then learning wireless. Native of Pressnitz, Austria, 26 years. Write to your sister.—Address MRS. PAULA OTT SYKORA, Hotel Reliance, Spokane, Wash.

FITZGERALD, GARRET, last heard from in Boston, Mass., about 1902. Age 40; 6 ft. 2 ins.—Address L. T. 320, care *Adventure*.

ANDERSON, CARL O., formerly of Denver, W. Durango, Col., with me in Memphis, W. Hot Springs, Ark., in 1912. Last heard of in Atlanta, Ga., 1912.—Address O. L. GRIFFITH, 41 South Fallon St., West Philadelphia, Pa.

PRITZART, ALBERT, left Los Angeles on prospecting trip to Arizona. Let me hear from you. Your former partner at the Chuckawalas.—Address E. B. C., Box 613, Hayden, Ariz.

COMRADES Co. D. 17th Infantry in Mindanao, P. I., 1900-1903. Please communicate with Wm. D. Evens, especially Harry Hawkins, John Broyles, Wm. Puckett.—Address W. D. EVENS, Racine Boon Co., W. Va.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WITTENKAMP, OVE, last heard of Buenos Aires, So. America, 1910. Age 25 years, dark hair, blue eyes, 5 ft., 165 lbs.—Address OVE NELSON CUSHING, Polk Co., Wis.

SCHELL, FRED B., brother. Last heard of him in New York State, 1913.—Address E. LESLIE SCHELL, Ancon, Canal Zone.

DEWITT, E. L. "De," write to Benny at Arbuckle, California.

LINN, ROBERT HAMILTON, last heard of Spokane, Washington, 1908.—Address ROSS METZ, Highland Park, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

ADAIR, WM. L. (Bronco), last heard of in Aurora, Ill. Your brother.—Address C. E. ADAIR, 432 West 41st Pl., Los Angeles, Calif.

STANTON, JOHN AND JOSEPH, sons of Mary J. Stanton (maiden name Barker): lived at one time 737 10th Avenue, N. Y. City; one became bricklayer, the other supposed to have enlisted in Army or Navy, five to eight years ago.—Address X. Y. Z.

FIRST or second mates on the barkantine *Emily Waters* on trips to South America and around the Horn or to Australia and Barbadoes.—Address P. T. O., care *Adventure*.

HAMMOND, WARRY, last heard from Winnipeg, last June. Barber by trade.—Address M. E. H., 52 Chebucto Rd., Halifax, N. S.

THE following have been inquired for in the April and May issue of Adventure. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BOULTON, FREDERICK E.; Brownell, Richard and Robert Marshall; Butler, Jack (Ormondi) Challender, Claude; Chamberlain, Carlyle D.; Cole, Clyde W., San Francisco; Dawnie, George M.; Driebeles, Jack; Elliot, Robert (Bob); Evans, Frank; Fairbanks, Frank G.; Flynn, James; Gattey, Capt. G. G. 1901-4; Harper, John; Herbert, Jack; Heyer, Milton Albert; Holland, Frank; Howard, John, scout in Montana during Indian War; Howlett, Lee; Jame, J. R.; Kennedy, Frank; King, Frank M.; Kirkpatrick, Clyde M.; Lounsbury, Herbert Harley, alias Perter Sterling; Maffei, Heck; Marshall, Robert; McGuire, Thomas James; McLaughlin, Dr. C. H.; Moore, Frank L., Seattle, Wash.; Morine, Col. Charles A.; Owen, G. P.; Peters, W. Milton; Pinney, Bertie; Prunty, F. W., well-driller; Rider, Wm., 41st U. S. Vol.; Romandovski, Ella von; Rowe, Theodore, formerly "L" engineer; Sellers, Edwin, Henderson; Sharpe, Melburn, Curley; Smedegard, James; Smith, J. J., formerly with R. R. Club; Snyder, William; Summers, Thomas M.; Thompson, Frank J.; Tobisen, Charles J.; Townsend, Harry S.; Watson, A. W.; Weyman, Jack; Wickens, Fred.

MISCELLANEOUS: Any boys in the 4th or 36th Co., U. S. C. A. C., 1911 to 1913; any of the boys on the tug *Tatoosh* 1911, time of rescue of S. S. *Washington*; comrades, A Co. American Insurrectos, 1900-11; comrades of the 17th B. T. A.; friend, who answered my ad which appeared in *Adventure* during 1913. You will recognize me by the capital W and arrow on the backs of my letters; G. A. M.; James, Elias, Allegheny, Pa.; Kenny, John, Pittsburg, Pa.; Miller, Henry, Detroit, Mich.; "Jew Sam" last name forgotten; Reckless, where are you? (Faust Rupp.)

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, Lawrence Stewart, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Mrs. Maude Thomas, George A. Blanchard, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those stories mentioned in our ad. on page 2, the following are scheduled for the July issue, out June 3d:

CASSIDAY'S CONSOLIDATION KICK	*Hugh S. Fullerton*
WHEN OSCAR WENT WILD	*W. C. Tuttle*
THE PEACE HAT	*Thomas Addison*
WILD BILL IN DEADWOOD GULCH	*Robert V. Carr*
OLD DAD	*George L. Catton*

OTHER FEATURES *by Henry Oyen, Hapsburg Liebe, Redfield Ingalls, David L. MacKaye, William R. Thompson*

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From Soldiers and Clerks, Ministers, Doctors and Adventurers

The real test of a magazine is not what its editors think and say about it, but what its readers think and say. The following, samples taken from many similar expressions, bring out several very striking points, which you will see for yourselves:

I have been trying lately to find copies of back numbers, but with very little success. After searching through files of magazines in second-hand book stores I have found only four. The shelves are full of back numbers of other magazines, and good ones, too, but no *Adventures*.—VINCENT NEALE, San Francisco, Cal.

This letter is one of thanks for giving us just such a magazine as *Adventure* is and always has been, as far as my memory goes, a periodical *sans* smut, *sans* "art," and *sans* all the rest of the present-day neurotic, erotic and tommy-rotic piffle to be found within the covers of pretty nearly any other popular magazine printed in the U. S. A.

My boy and girl can have all the *Adventures* they like, but I draw the line at most of the rest.—DR. H. T. EDWARDS, South Bethlehem, Pa.

I have made arrangements to have *Adventure* sent to me every month while I am at the front. I have wandered all over the world and it is the finest magazine published for men with red blood in their veins.—CORP. W. H. STEVENSON, Lord Strathcona's Horse, 1st Canadian Contingent on Active Service.

The stories have always had a certain distinctive, personal quality not to be found in the average short fiction magazine. They have in most instances appeared to be fiction founded on fact. When you get a story of this type, told by a man who knows, you generally have something unique.—G. MENZIES MILLER, Brattleboro, Vt.

Though a minister of the Gospel, believe me, I look forward to *Adventure* with boyish eagerness each month. God bless you, man! Keep on giving us stories that are clean and wholesome, for I have a son coming up.

Now for the kick. No part of *Adventure* grips me more than the "Camp-Fire." Having knocked around some myself (I'm a national evangelist now, largely owing to the wanderlust in me), I "kick in" first at the "Camp-Fire," and enjoy hugely your comments, the word from "the boys" and the "Lost Trails." When you started up the American Legion I said "AMEN!" Later, you enumerated the professions and vocations eligible.* I read and re-read looking for "Chaplain." What's wrong with you anyhow? You know that we are all religious animals. When a fellow comes square up against death, watch him pray. Even the infidel has a creed and is religious. Man dear, give Jesus Christ a chance at the boys, and give them a chance at the *man* Christ Jesus. The present war is proving the deep religious make-up of mankind. Word comes to me of this from some of our own fellows as well as the Canadians, Scotch and British. Not to mention the balance of those fighting.

I served three years as Chaplain, 2d Reg. A. N. G. My name is on file with the War Department for active service if the need should ever come.

I'll forgive you if you put my name "in the pot" as a Chaplain in the American Legion.—PERCY G. CROSS, San Antonio, Texas.

** Chaplains are now included in the list.*

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Mr. Bushnell is a well-known insurance broker in S——, Pa.

This Man Earns Over $20.00 a Week Extra

We need men.

Men now located in business—family men who desire to supplement their present income $10.00, $20.00, $35.00 a week extra; men known and respected, who have ability and know how to use it. If you can "measure up," we will place with you a local subscription agency for EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE and THE DELINEATOR. The appointment will be permanent. We furnish everything—pay you both commission and salary, and look to you for results.

It is a business plan, conducted in a dignified, business way, and can be of as large returns to you as to hundreds of other business men now working under similar appointments.

Mr. Bushnell is only one of hundreds of our representatives who supplement their regular incomes through subscription work by over $20.00 a week. Some representatives, devoting all their time to the work, earn $50.00 a week and upwards.

If your income needs supplementing, if you have ability, if given our plan of increasing your income you can, and will apply yourself in the development of same, we will consider your application. Write immediately to address below, giving two references, and telling us in your letter exactly how you are located, how much money you want, and how much time you can take toward the development of same.

Address: Desk A, The Ridgway Company, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

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